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Submissions

Twentieth-Century Literature welcomes the submission of new scholarly essays on any aspect of literature written in the twentieth century. Essays should be prepared in accordance with the *MLA Style Manual,* 2nd ed. Send your essay as an e-mail attachment to Twentieth-Century. Literature@Hofstra.edu. Or mail three hard copies to Twentieth-Century Literature, 107 Hofstra University, Hempstead NY 11549-1070. Include a self-addressed, stamped envelope for return.

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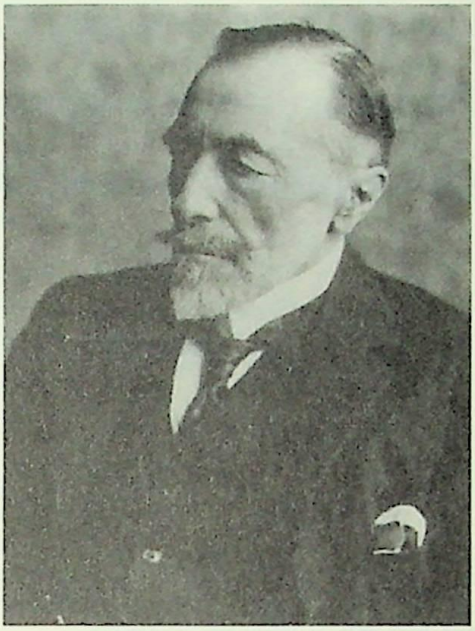
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Call for papers: Academic orthodoxies

Twentieth-Century Literature seeks essays for a special issue on professional orthodoxies in the academy. We invite essays that explore the ways in which our academic culture shapes intellectual inquiry and affective worlds for both faculty and students. Essays may take up such concerns as theoretical canons and their consequences for how ideas are ranked and valued; the impact of professionalized vocabularies on the inner lives of academicians and our students; issues of intellectual freedom broadly considered; the conditions for scholarship and teaching at politically conservative or religiously oriented institutions of learning; the anxieties surrounding humanistic or liberal approaches within mainstream literary scholarship and within institutions; the ways in which professionalization affects the sense of self and of mission; or the phenomenon of ideological change within the academy. We ask that where possible, submissions include some engagement with twentieth-century literary texts or reflection on the course of twentieth-century studies. We will be happy to consider short essayistic pieces as well as full-length scholarly articles. All viewpoints are welcome. Please send inquiries or submissions to Lisa Ruddick <lruddick@uchicago.edu>.

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The Joseph Conrad Society of America presents an annual Bruce Harkness Young Conrad Scholar Award, named in honor of Bruce Harkness, Conrad scholar and former president of the society. The award is given annually to an outstanding graduate student who is writing a dissertation on Conrad or to a recent PhD who has been teaching for no more than five years and is doing research on Conrad. The award consists of a $100 honorarium, one year's membership in the Joseph Conrad Society of America, and a complimentary invitation to the annual Conrad Society dinner held during the Modern Language Association convention. A letter of recommendation, the nominee's CV, and two copies of a sample of his or her scholarly writing (not to exceed 9,000 words) should be sent to Andrea White, President of the Joseph Conrad Society of America, Department of English, California State University, Dominguez Hills, 1000 E. Victoria Street, Carson, CA 90747, postmarked by November 1, 2006. Entries will be returned only if accompanied by a large, self-addressed, stamped envelope. The 2006 award will be presented at the annual Conrad Society dinner to be held in December 2006 during the annual Modern Language Association Convention in Philadelphia.

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Truth, Reconciliation, and the Restoration of the State: Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*

Troy Urquhart

> I never wished it for the barbarians that they should have the history of Empire laid upon them.
>
> —J. M. Coetzee (*Waiting for the Barbarians* 151)

In *Writing History, Writing Trauma,* Dominick LaCapra observes that the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) "was in its own way a trauma recovery center" (43) providing a social mechanism for South Africa to work through the trauma caused by apartheid. LaCapra's observation suggests that the TRC offers a method through which the rupture caused by centuries of domination under a system rooted in racial and cultural inequality might be healed by reconciling the oppressed with the oppressors. The motto on the TRC's home page, "Truth. The Road to Reconciliation," summarizes the commission's ideology. The singular *truth* here implies that an empirically verifiable truth can be found, and the juxtaposition of "The Road to Reconciliation" with "Truth" suggests that the publication or voicing of truth will lead directly to reconciliation in South Africa, perhaps even that for the TRC, "Truth" and "The Road to Reconciliation" have become equivalent terms. The TRC's goals, however, are implicitly more ambitious than either LaCapra or its internet home page indicate. The TRC is a part of South Africa's Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, so one of its aims from the outset has been to achieve justice in South Africa. Exposing truth, it implies, brings not only reconciliation but also a sort of justice.

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Although it predated the establishment of the TRC by 15 years, J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* anticipates and challenges the TRC's conflation of the quest for truth with the quest for justice. Like the TRC, much of the criticism of Coetzee's novel sees exposing the experiences of the oppressed as a sort of justice, but I see in the novel a pointed critique: the state's re-membering of the often fragmentary evidence of oppression amounts not to justice in the reparative sense but rather to an expedient, a way to secure political legitimacy. *Waiting for the Barbarians* articulates the problem of justice in South Africa and challenges the basic premises of the TRC by exploring, first, the difficulty of establishing the truth about the experience of the oppressed and, second, the manipulation of their voices to protect the interests of the state.

Something called restorative justice

> [T]he perpetrator . . . should be given the opportunity to be reintegrated into the community he has injured by his offense.
>
> —Desmond Mpilo Tutu (55)

The justice that the TRC seeks for South Africa does not attempt to heal the victim at the expense of the perpetrator. Rather, the TRC's goal is to heal the perpetrator alongside the victim, to make the perpetrator a viable part of a new South African society that values both the victim and the perpetrator equally. According to the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act of 1995, the legislation that established the TRC, its stated purpose is fourfold.[1] First, the TRC is charged with creating "as complete a picture as possible" of the atrocities of apartheid by recording both "the perspectives of the victims and the motives and perspectives of the persons responsible" for those atrocities. Second, the TRC serves to facilitate the "granting of amnesty" to those who "make full disclosure" of their involvement in human rights violations. Third, the TRC is to restore the "human and civil dignity" of the victims of atrocities "by granting them an opportunity to relate their own accounts" and "by recommending reparation measures." Finally, the TRC is to construct a narrative of apartheid based on its findings that provides "as comprehensive an account as possible" and recommends "measures to prevent the future violations of human rights" (2.3.1). Although part of its task is to make recommendations about reparations, the TRC's primary concern is to foster social

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healing that reconciles the divisions in South African society and allows it to carry on as a unified state. This social healing, in the TRC's view, constitutes justice, a new type of justice that Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the chair of the TRC, terms "restorative justice" (54).[2]

Clearly, part of Tutu's goal in pursuing restorative justice is to avoid the violence historically inherent both in the traditional exacting of justice and in decolonization. *The Wretched of the Earth,* Frantz Fanon's manifesto for African revolution, declares that "decolonization is always a violent phenomenon" (35), and it is this violence that Tutu fears.[3] He claims that "We make the mistake of conflating all justice into retributive justice, whereas there is something called restorative justice, and this is the justice we have chosen" (qtd. in Ryan). The central concern of this type of justice, as Tutu defines it, is

> the healing of breaches, the redressing of imbalances, the restoration of broken relationships, a seeking to rehabilitate both the victim and the perpetrator, who should be given the opportunity to be reintegrated into the community he has injured by his offense. (54–55)

Tutu's goal of restoring "broken relationships" implies an Edenic South African past. It romantically suggests both that a return to this prelapsarian state is possible and that such a return can come about through the TRC's work. Describing this work as "restorative," then, is an attempt to revise the history of South Africa and thereby to revise public opinion about the South African state itself.

Narrative can help cure trauma, of course, but the victim whom the TRC is attempting to heal is not the individual traumatized under apartheid but the South African state. While we should surely draw a distinction between the present South African government and its oppressive predecessor, we should also acknowledge that the former oppressors in South Africa still hold a significant portion of the nation's capital, and that an attempt to redistribute this capital would risk inverting the old hierarchy. The new South African government thus redefines justice as "restorative" rather than retributive or reparative to avoid becoming another version of the hierarchal political system it is replacing. In this light, the TRC's primary task, to "promote national unity and reconciliation," is telling, for it suggests that what the TRC is establishing with its restorative justice is the power and political legitimacy of the South

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African government, and what the TRC is healing is not the individuals who have suffered under apartheid but the South African state.

Critics of *Waiting for the Barbarians* generally see the novel as trying to evade the issue of retributive justice by erasing the distinction between Empire and barbarian, between the oppressor and the victim. Much of the commentary, in fact, reproduces the TRC's tendency to see this erasure—a goal of restorative justice—as justice that serves the interests of the victim. David Attwell posits that *Waiting for the Barbarians* allows for the hope of a reconstruction of the subject outside the Empire/barbarian dichotomy. Similarly, Michael Valdez Moses looks at the novel as an expression of the desire to escape this dichotomy, proposing that it looks forward to a new ethical order founded on Edenic principles:[4] Coetzee "offers . . . an unrealized and unrecognized possibility that he styles an 'African Eden,' equally available to white and black" (125). This Eden anticipates the TRC's goal of transcending the "conflicts and divisions of the past." It "rehabilitate[s] both the victim and the perpetrator" (Tutu 55), offering a redefinition of the power relations of society through what Tutu calls restorative justice. Like the TRC's vision of a reconciled South African state, Attwell's and Moses's Edenic vision associates a pluralistic society, where each person's voice is given equal value, with justice.

Susan VanZanten Gallagher's reading of *Waiting for the Barbarians* also finds hope in restorative justice and the narrativization of oppression. She suggests that truth telling and giving the victim a voice constitute justice. Seeing Coetzee searching for texts that weave together fragments of the victims' histories and thereby expose the truth about their suffering at the hands of Empire, she finds that *Waiting for the Barbarians* reveals "the hope that in storytelling—impotent, opaque, and uncertain as it might be—oppression and torture may be unveiled" (281). In Gallagher's reading, because the voice of the storyteller temporarily creates the moral center that the world lacks (281n1), narrative can be used "to advance moral truths." By constructing the history of the oppressed from fragmentary evidence, the storyteller who speaks of violence and oppression reconstructs an ethical order. The storyteller becomes a "temporary father-interpreter" (280) for the oppressed and, in the TRC's terms, creates "as complete a picture as possible" of oppression. Gallagher's model of storytelling is analogous to Tutu's model of restorative justice, for in creating a moral center the storyteller restores the dignity of both the victim and himself. But her suggestion that the victim is restored through a "temporary fa-

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ther-interpreter" reveals one of the troubling assumptions of the TRC's restorative justice: the truly oppressed cannot speak for themselves, so it is only through the fatherhood of restorative justice that their voices can be heard.[5]

Gallagher's reading fails to take into account how the state structures, constrains, and values the voices of the oppressed. In a discussion of postcolonial India, Peter van der Veer points out that a true expression of violence cannot be articulated, for the victim lacks a history. The narrative of the victim's counterhistory is always created by and in the service of the state, he argues, and the evidence provided by the victim is necessarily fragmented, giving us "no plot, no narrative, only leads that go nowhere" (199). While the oppressive state sometimes goes to great lengths to destroy these leads, more frequently the fragments become unified by weaving them into the narrative of an approved counterhistory. On the history of India, van der Veer writes:

> [M]ore often than not the memory of violent events is not obliterated or suppressed; rather, such events are remembered as fragments of a story whose unitary, rational subject is the liberal nation-state. History is a teleology leading . . . to the liberated . . . nation-state. Suffering and pain acquire meaning from the larger story of progress; otherwise they would be "senseless," incoherent, without any meaning for the larger story. (189)

The historical memory of violence is not repressed by the oppressive state but constructed as something that serves its purpose, something that includes the oppressed in "the larger story" of the state's history. Coetzee's novel suggests that the counterhistory leading to the restorative justice of the TRC does not effect justice but avoids it. Indeed, in its final report the TRC acknowledges that the "view that the Committee was 'perpetrator friendly' was . . . to an extent understandable and even unavoidable" (84). Restorative justice does not heal the victim but the state, whitewashing history through a search for truth that, ultimately, allows people to get away with murder.

Waiting for the Barbarians recognizes that being allowed a voice constitutes neither equality nor justice, and that, as van der Veer reminds us, the search for truth is necessarily self-interested. The novel's narrator, the Magistrate, wants to serve the interests of justice even if it means he is the "One Just Man" (111) who opposes Empire, and his search for justice is

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anchored in his search for knowledge about the experience of the victims of Empire. He collects artifacts of those silenced by Empire, fragments of their experiences, and even though he cannot read them, his desire to oppose the Empire by giving a voice to the oppressed is so intense that, when given the opportunity, he pretends to construct their history. Gallagher's description of the Magistrate as a "father-interpreter" who can give the absent voice of the victim a "temporary presence" (285) suggests the hope that restorative justice will work, that justice will prevail in South Africa, yet it accounts for neither the investment of the Magistrate in his own act of interpretation nor the impossibility of his accurately interpreting the voice of the oppressed.

In attempting to speak for the barbarians, what the Magistrate achieves is not reparation but penance, not justice but justification of his own complicity in the atrocities of Empire.[6] He wants to believe he is motivated by a desire to serve justice but does not acknowledge the desire to expunge his own guilt. In imagining that he can read the fragmentary evidence of Empire's victims and in attempting to read the mark of Empire on the body of the barbarian girl he prostitutes, he confuses penance with reparation, confuses his desire to heal himself with a desire to heal the victims. As he seeks restorative rather than retributive justice, he suppresses his own complicity in the violent oppression of others.

Penance and reparation

> [T]here must always be a place for penance and reparation.
>
> —J. M. Coetzee (*Waiting for the Barbarians* 79)

The contrast in *Waiting for the Barbarians* between the Magistrate's search for truth and that of Colonel Joll prefigures the contrast between the truth seeking of the TRC and that of the South African state under apartheid. Joll is the quintessential torturer, seeking truth for his own ends by violent means, while the Magistrate is well-intentioned and apparently nonviolent, seeking truth as a way to escape the injustice of the Empire and thereby to effect justice.[7] Both Joll and the Magistrate want to hear the voice of those the Empire considers barbarians, but while Joll identifies "barbarian language" as the screams of torture victims (119), the Magistrate attempts to speak for the barbarian by translating barbarian experience into the language of Empire. The most significant of the Magistrate's

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attempts to speak for the other is his pretended translation of wooden slips at the insistence of Colonel Joll. The Magistrate, who presides over a town on the border of the Empire, has excavated these slips from the ruins of a nearby city, presumably the ruins of an earlier empire that was destroyed in the early days of the present one, and he spends hours trying to decipher the meaning of the characters inscribed on them. He discovers a "cache of wooden slips on which are painted characters in a script" indecipherable to him and "set[s] about collecting all the slips [he] can" (14–15). He longs to understand something about the experience of those destroyed by Empire, and he collects these fragments as evidence, trying to decipher their meaning, thinking first that they are characters in a script, then wondering if they "might in fact be elements of a picture whose outline would leap at me if I struck on the right arrangement: a map of the land of the barbarians in olden times, or a representation of a lost pantheon" (15). In trying to understand the meaning of the slips, he manipulates them, sometimes "reading the slips in a mirror, or tracing one on top of another, or conflating half of one with half of another." He cannot understand the barbarian in barbarian terms, so he changes and distorts the markings in an attempt to make them comprehensible in terms of his own knowledge and experience.[8]

While the Magistrate seems to recognize his inability to comprehend the victims of Empire, he later pretends to read the wooden slips in order to pit himself against Joll and thereby justify his own position. Late in the novel, Joll confronts the Magistrate with the wooden slips and demands an explanation of their contents, implying that the slips contain messages passed between the Magistrate and the barbarians. In spite of his earlier fascination with them, the Magistrate still does not know what message, if any, they contain. He does "not even know whether to read from right to left or from left to right" and has "no idea what they stand for" (108), but he "runs [his finger] along the line of characters from right to left," pretending to read. What he says describes his own experience. His performance quickly turns into a catalogue of the atrocities committed by Joll and his men in the Magistrate's town: the dead body of the imagined writer's son is described as "sewn in a sheet," a stitch through each eyelid and its feet "swollen and broken" (109). The Magistrate constructs this tale based on his first-hand knowledge of the Empire's treatment of the barbarians, not on any knowledge of the writer of the slips. He conflates the experience of one barbarian with that of another and assigns the

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experience to a third, combining a description of the death of a prisoner whose body is sewn in a sheet early in the novel with the hobbling and blinding of the barbarian girl who becomes his mistress.[9] Arguably the Magistrate's "reading" is a form of political protest, but he speaks for the oppressed only by looking "in a mirror" at his own experiences and by "conflating half of one [barbarian] with half of another" (15). He does not—indeed, cannot—speak for the writer of the slips, whose experience remains entirely unknown to him.

Critics have tended to approach this scene with varying degrees of hope that the victims of Empire can be represented. Reading the scene through Derrida, Lance Olsen asserts that the "wood slips form an absence which may be supplemented in an endless number of ways, cut off from responsibility, from authority, an emblem of orphaned language, nothing more than a productive mechanism" (53). For Olsen, the Magistrate becomes free from the injustice of Empire in the act of interpretation, for he escapes the rigid signification of Empire that would insist on a single meaning for the slips. The Magistrate's position seems morally superior to—and perhaps more productive than—Joll's, Olsen argues, for Joll is trapped by his belief that each signifier must contain a single, fixed meaning, while the Magistrate, even if he feels "despair before the arbitrariness of language" (55), allows the signifier to move freely among interpretations. Joll is confined by the rigidity of the Empire's law, which fixes the field of signifiers, while the Magistrate is free of the confines of Empire—linguistically, at least—and this freedom allows him to gain some knowledge or understanding of the victim's experience.

Responding to Olsen, Gallagher suggests, as we have seen, that the Magistrate becomes a "temporary father-interpreter" for the barbarian language. She proposes that part of Coetzee's project in *Waiting for the Barbarians* is "to find texts transparent enough to carry meaning" (280) and that the Magistrate's translation of the wooden slips suggests that "oppression and torture may be unveiled" through storytelling (281). The fact that the signifier is open to multiple interpretations, she argues, does not make it meaningless; because the Magistrate continues to use language even when faced with its arbitrariness, language can be used "to advance moral truths."

Just as the TRC believes it can narrate the events of apartheid, Olsen and Gallagher find in the Magistrate's interpreting the wooden slips the possibility of representing the victims' experience. But this finding

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does not recognize that his interpretation is self-interested. Certainly the wooden slips might have contained meaning in the language of their original writer, but all who spoke that language are dead, permanently silenced by Empire, just as those who have been most oppressed by the system of apartheid in South Africa have been permanently silenced. When the Magistrate speaks for the writer of the slips, the experiences he narrates are his own. The problem of his performance reproduces the problem of representation articulated by Gayatri Spivak as the distinction between *vertreten* and *darstellen:*

> the shifting distinctions between representation within the state and political economy, on the one hand, and within the theory of the Subject, on the other, must not be obliterated. Let us consider the play of *vertreten* ("represent" in the first sense) and *darstellen* ("re-present" in the second sense). . . . (275–76)

Representation in the first sense, *vertreten,* denotes political proxy, speaking on behalf of the other, while the second, *darstellen,* denotes a mimetic re-presentation or portrait. To "confront [the subaltern] is not to represent (*vertreten*) them but to learn to represent (*darstellen*) ourselves" (288–89), Spivak writes, and this is certainly the case in the Magistrate's attempt to represent the writer of the wooden slips. Since he cannot read the slips, he cannot represent the writer in terms of political proxy (*vertreten*), and thus his reading can only be a re-presentation (*darstellen*) of his own experiences. This is not to say that he cannot discover the "moral truths" that Gallagher seeks, but any truth he finds will be his own, and not the truth of the writer of the wooden slips. He cannot narrate the experience of the other, and he cannot restore the dignity of the other. This scene thus reveals the problem that underlies restorative justice: it is the Magistrate, the speaking agent of the state—and not the silenced victim—whose dignity is restored.

In Spivak's influential discussion about the possibility of speaking of or for the subaltern, she critiques Deleuze's and Foucault's claims that while there is no single, complete narrative that can articulate the experience of the other, that experience can be understood by a "persistent critique" (272). That is, we can come to know *a* truth, if not *the* truth, about the other. In response to Deleuze's claim that "Reality is what actually happens in a factory, in a school, in barracks, in a prison, in a police station" (qtd. in Spivak 275), Spivak writes:

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> This foreclosing of the necessity of the difficult task of counterhegemonic ideological production has not been salutary. It has helped positivist empiricism—the justifying foundation of advanced capitalist neocolonialism—to define its own arena as "concrete experience," "what actually happens" . . . . Neither Deleuze nor Foucault seems aware that the intellectual within socialized capital, brandishing concrete experience, can help consolidate the international division of labor. (275)

At the center of Spivak's criticism is the inescapable ideological position of the intellectual who attempts to construct the narrative of the oppressed, the intellectual who weaves together the fragmentary evidence of the experience of the other, and she accuses Foucault and Deleuze of "systematically ignor[ing] . . . their own implication in intellectual and economic history" (272). The intellectual who constructs such a narrative does not liberate the oppressed, for the narrative serves the system that the intellectual seeks to oppose; the "reality" that such a narrative seeks to expose merely integrates these fragments into what van der Veer calls "the larger story of progress" (189).

If we accept Spivak's conclusion that the "subaltern cannot speak" (308), the project of the TRC seems no less doomed to failure than the attempts by the Magistrate to understand the experience of the oppressed, for the truth that the TRC believes will lead to reconciliation cannot be articulated. Linda Alcoff observes that "the practice of speaking for others is often born of a desire . . . to privilege oneself as the one who more correctly understands the truth about another's situation or as one who can champion a just cause" (29), and this certainly seems to be the Magistrate's motivation. Moreover, through the conflation of the search for truth with the effecting of justice, the state creates a narrative of oppression that may have the veneer of justice but ultimately serves its own power.

Just as part of the TRC's project is to redefine the position of the South African government so that it can critique its earlier self, part of the Magistrate's search for social justice is to find some position from which he can oppose the Empire. This is evident as he coerces a barbarian girl to live with him, forcing her off the street where she begs and supports herself through prostitution. Hobbled and partially blinded by Joll in his own search for truth, she becomes, for the Magistrate, the embodiment of the oppression he longs to understand. Contemplating his relationship

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with the barbarian girl, the Magistrate claims his motives are honorable: "I wanted to do what was right, I wanted to make reparation: I will not deny this decent impulse, however mixed with more questionable motives: there must always be a place for penance and reparation" (79).

Although the Magistrate's "questionable motives" may be interpreted as including his muted and largely impotent sexual fascination with the girl, they also include his desire to save himself from the shame of his involvement in the workings of Empire. When thrown in prison, at first he feels elated because he believes that his "alliance with the guardians of the Empire is over" (76) (recalling Henry David Thoreau's view that "[u]nder a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison" [859]), yet he quickly understands that his opposition to the Empire is not based on principle but rather on the wish that it could be based on principle: "In my opposition there is nothing heroic—let me not for an instant forget that" (77). He wants to be the "One Just Man" of Empire, but he sees that his treatment of the barbarians, while different in intention, is not so different in effect from the treatment they receive at the hands of Joll. Early on, as he first faces the physical mark of Empire, the mark on the body left by torture, he entreats a boy taken prisoner by Colonel Joll to confess: "Listen: you must tell the officer the truth. That is all he wants to hear from you—the truth. Once he is sure you are telling the truth he will not hurt you. But you must tell him everything you know" (7). Although he intends to help the boy, and although he tries to speak to him from a position other than the Empire's, he almost immediately recognizes that he is as involved in the torture of this boy, in the process of exacting truth, as Joll is. He "cannot pretend to be any better than a mother comforting a child between his father's spells of wrath," and he recognizes that "an interrogator can wear two masks, speak with two voices, one harsh, one seductive" (7). Later, he realizes that he is "the lie that Empire tells itself when times are easy; [Joll] the truth that Empire tells when harsh winds blow." He and Joll are "[t]wo sides of imperial rule, no more, no less" (133). The Magistrate, the old man who serves as peacetime governor for this town, recognizes that in spite of his best intentions and his desire to be a just leader, his voice is the seductive side of the voice of torture, and his speech serves the Empire whose acts of violence he detests.

In the face of his own complicity, he begins to confuse justice with penance; he confuses his desire to save the victim of Empire with his de-

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sire to save himself. When he is confronted by the spectacle of the abused barbarian girl, he longs to purify himself, to wash away the feelings of uncleanliness and guilt that come with the recognition of his own complicity. He wonders if Colonel Joll "has a private ritual of purification" that allows him to exist in "clean" society after committing unclean acts, and he imagines Joll "wash[ing] his hands very carefully" or "chang[ing] all his clothes" (12) to remove the stain of guilt left by torture. When the Magistrate sees what has become of the barracks hall that has served as a jail for Joll's prisoners, he shouts, "I want everything cleaned up! Soap and water! I want everything as it was before!" (23), revealing his desire to erase the physical evidence of torture and his own involvement in it. But the most suggestive ritual of washing in the novel is the Magistrate's compulsive washing of the barbarian girl's disfigured feet, an act he describes as "rapture, of a kind" (29). If we associate this act with the washing of feet in John 13,[10] it suggests that the Magistrate tries to act as the girl's savior, that he tries to purify her after she has been defiled, first at the hands of Joll and then by living as a prostitute. Ironically, this act of salvation comes only as he makes her, in effect, his whore. However, if we associate it with the sinning woman's compulsion to wash Jesus's feet and anoint them with oil in Luke 7,[11] the ritual suggests that it is the Magistrate who has become a prostitute, buying a life of leisure from the Empire by selling himself through silent complicity with a system of torture and oppression, and that he believes at some level that the girl will be his salvation. His compulsion to wash her hobbled feet, to explore the marks on her body with his hands and thereby understand something about her experience with the Empire, parallels his desire to read the wooden slips and understand the experience of their writer.

What is at stake in his desire to read these marks is his own salvation. Without a knowledge of the experience of the tortured girl, he cannot confess, and his guilt cannot be expunged. Kissing her forehead, he asks, "What did they do to you?" (31), longing for her to narrate her experience of torture for him, and when she does not answer him, he runs his fingers over her body, feeling "a phantom criss-cross of ridges under the skin." He, like the torturer Joll, probes her body for truth, demanding an answer that she seems reluctant or unable to provide.[12] For much of the novel, she does not respond to his questions, and when she finally does try to answer, he is still unsatisfied. She tells of being partially blinded,

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giving what seems to be a factual account of the experience, but that is not enough for him:

> I take her face between my hands and stare into the dead centres of her eyes, from which twin reflections of myself stare solemnly back. "And this?" I say, touching the worm-like sear in the corner.
>
> "That is nothing. That is where the iron touched me. It made a little burn. It is not sore." She pushes my hands away.
>
> "What do you feel towards the men who did this?"
>
> She lies thinking a long time. Then she says, "I am tired of talking." (40–41)

As the Magistrate tries to see the experience of the barbarian girl, he sees only his own reflection; he seeks to understand her not for her sake but so that he can forget her and save himself. He thinks that in order to leave his complicity with torture and oppression behind, he must understand her experience.

Coetzee's novel troubles the conflation of truth with justice. While the Magistrate wants his concern for the barbarians to serve as reparation, his actions do not repair the barbarian girl's eyes or feet. Instead, they serve as his penance: even if he is not forgiven by the barbarian girl, he can at least forgive himself for his own complicity in her torture and, by extension, the torture and murder of countless others.

In the same way that he tries to interpret the girl's body and the marks on the wooden slips, he searches for meaning in the three specks on the wall of the room in which he has been imprisoned, trying to translate them into the voice of the oppressed: "Why are they in a row? Who put them there? Do they stand for anything?" (83). He "realize[s] how tiny [he has] allowed them to make [his] world, how [he] daily become[s] more like a beast or a simple machine, a child's spinning-wheel, for example" (83). Searching for meaning in something he cannot understand leads him to realize how confined he is by the Empire—by its language, its subject positions, its meanings—but this realization does not allow him to escape those confines. Even if he recognizes that he is confined by the ideological position of Imperial Magistrate, he cannot escape it and occupy the position of the other.

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Not justice but justification

> I cannot save the prisoners, therefore let me save myself.
> —J. M. Coetzee (*Waiting for the Barbarians* 102)

In addition to offering a space in which those who were oppressed can speak about their oppression, the TRC offers redemption to those who confess their involvement in that oppression. However, for those like the Magistrate who are complicit in the actions of the Empire but not directly involved in committing atrocities, confession requires a knowledge of the wrongs that have been committed. The Magistrate's confession depends on his ability to discover what has happened, yet he cannot remember the barbarian girl as she was before being marked by Empire. Remembering her might offer him the opportunity to confess, but she has become a blank space in his mind, her image cast out because the memory of her body unmarked by torture would force him to confront the reality of her torture and the shame of his involvement in it.[13] He "believe[s] that [he] saw her on the day she was brought in by the soldiers roped neck to neck with the other barbarian prisoners," yet he has "no memory of that passage" (33). He believes that "the memory [of the girl] is lodged" within "the honeycomb of [his] brain," but she remains "a space, a blankness" even though he "can remember every [other] detail" of the scene in which the barbarian prisoners enter the town (46). If his repression of his memories of the girl represents his defense against the overwhelming guilt of his own complicity in her torture, his compulsion to trace the outline of her body represents his attempt to master this guilt, to understand the mark of Empire and somehow make sense of his involvement in her torture. If he could remember her, he could, perhaps, make some sense of this experience. Remembering the barbarian girl would then become a kind of forgetting, for it is by remembering that he would be able to redeem himself.

It will take time to understand the long-term effects of the TRC's investigations and report, but the report, released in March 2003, is ambiguous in its attempt to define and establish justice. Tutu recognizes the problematic implications of retributive justice—the South African government could no longer exist, the oppressors would trade places with the oppressed—so the TRC calls for restorative justice as a way to heal South Africa and allow it to transcend the "conflicts and divisions of the past."

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This model of justice is, on the surface, attractive to everyone involved. For the oppressed, it offers the fantasy of an Edenesque return to absolute equality and freedom. For the oppressor, it offers easy forgiveness for the atrocities and a continuing place in the legal and economic affairs of South Africa. A report from the South African Press Association issued after the completion of the TRC's final two volumes describes Tutu as insisting that the "Truth and Reconciliation Commission did not seek to punish people" and that "the TRC did not set out to embarrass anyone"; rather, it worked "to find evidence for people to accept responsibility and accountability" ("TRC Not Out to Punish"). But restorative justice whitewashes murder.

If we recognize the Magistrate as being politically invested in the Empire he critiques, we should also recognize that Tutu is invested in the future of the South African state. And just as the Magistrate's search for justice is motivated by a desire for penance rather than reparation, the TRC's search for justice is at least partially motivated by similar goals: to gain forgiveness for the South African state, to quickly move beyond its painful past, and to restore its political legitimacy. And if these are its goals, it has done remarkably well: according to Cape Town's Institute for Democracy in South Africa, 25 percent of black South Africans now have a positive image of South Africa under apartheid ("Harper's Index").

Closely scrutinizing the TRC's goals becomes especially important as the TRC is being touted as a model of justice for other states to follow. Kiraitu Murungi, Kenya's Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, has instituted a truth commission, hoping that Kenya can "undergo the healing power of truth" (qtd. in "Kenya"); Iraq's Ibrahim Jaafari has called for a truth commission in Iraq modeled on South Africa's TRC ("Iraqi"); and the Reverend John Dinnen, Dean of Down, expresses a similar hope for Ireland. He has said:

> I appeal to both church and political leaders to give serious consideration to setting up a forum for healing through remembering, based on the lessons of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. (McCreary)

The question raised by the dean's appeal is this: just what are the "lessons" of the TRC? So far, it seems that Coetzee's Magistrate has proved a prophetic model, as the TRC, under cover of healing the victim, has maintained the power of the state. Truth commissions may be able to rec-

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oncile opposing parties, but they can be less interested in healing victims than in preserving the stability of the state that committed or condoned the actions they now condemn. The remembering undertaken through restorative justice becomes a way to demonstrate the state's moral legitimacy. It confuses penance with reparation, and it gives the victims a voice primarily to legitimize the power of government. Restorative justice is finally not about the victim but about restoration of the state.

Notes

1. South Africa's Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act of 1995 establishes the TRC and charges it with the following task:

> to promote national unity and reconciliation in a spirit of understanding which transcends the conflicts and divisions of the past by—
>
> (a) establishing as complete a picture as possible of the causes, nature and extent of the gross violations of human rights which were committed during the period from 1 March 1960 to the cut-off date, including the antecedents, circumstances, factors and context of such violations, as well as the perspectives of the victims and the motives and perspectives of the persons responsible for the commission of the violations, by conducting investigations and holding hearings;
>
> (b) facilitating the granting of amnesty to persons who make full disclosure of all the relevant facts relating to acts associated with a political objective and comply with the requirements of this Act;
>
> (c) establishing and making known the fate or whereabouts of victims and by restoring the human and civil dignity of such victims by granting them an opportunity to relate their own accounts of the violations of which they are the victims, and by recommending reparation measures in respect of them;
>
> (d) compiling a report providing as comprehensive an account as possible of the activities and findings of the Commission contemplated in paragraphs (a), (b) and (c), and which contains recommendations of measures to prevent the future violations of human rights. (2.3.1)

2. Some writers have challenged the ability of truth to serve as justice. For instance, Suzanne Daley observes that even though "the believers say that truth is at least half of justice," truth commissions do not provide justice but rather serve in its stead when retributive justice would be politically too difficult for

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a society. In a similar vein, Mary Braid describes the conflation of truth and justice in South Africa as "schizophrenia" and remarks that "[t]ruth, not justice, is the best new South Africa can offer."

The restorative justice that the TRC seeks through the exposure of truth should be contrasted to both retributive justice and reparative justice. Retributive justice, grounded in ideas descended from Hammurabi's code, would demand a punishment comparable to or in excess of the crime. In *Discipline and Punish,* Foucault observes that this type of punishment evolved into a political ritual in which the crime was often theatrically reproduced on the body of the perpetrator in "a spectacle not of measure, but of imbalance and excess" (49) in order to redress both the wrong done to the victim and the affront to the person of the sovereign, who embodies the law. Reparative justice, on the other hand, is concerned not with extracting the proverbial "eye for an eye" from the perpetrator but with demanding another form of compensation from the perpetrator for the victim that repays—but does not reproduce—the crime. As noted above, the TRC does include the establishment of reparations as one of its objectives, but its pursuit of reparative justice is clearly secondary to its pursuit of restorative justice, in which the narration of the truth about the crime supposedly reconciles victim and perpetrator, restoring both parties to their former, precrime status.

3. A 1996 *Financial Times* article quotes Tutu's statement that "if justice alone were allowed to take its course, the country would be reduced to ashes" ("Forgiving").

4. Moses argues that any government—even one that reverses a power dynamic through a coup d'état—relies on the distinction between Empire and barbarian for its definition of self. He suggests that Coetzee's novel seeks an option outside of this civilized/barbaric dichotomy: not an uplifting of the downtrodden or an overturning of power but rather a redefining of the structure of power itself through a return to an Edenesque way of life.

5. Even then, of course, we are not hearing the voice of the barbarian victim, but a Western interpretation of that voice. As I will argue, this is not necessarily a meaningful or accurate representation.

6. In *Complicities,* Mark Sanders points out: "The duty to speak out is linked with a will or desire not to be an accomplice" (4).

7. The TRC, like the Magistrate and also—rather disturbingly—like Joll, wants nothing more than to get at the truth. Of the appeals for amnesty that were refused by the TRC, it is striking that the basis for those refusals was almost always for not telling the truth, as is the case in the appeal of Bongane Shadrack

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Khumalo, who murdered a man in 1992 (Wilson). For further examples see the refused appeals of Andrias Matanzima Nosenga (Miller) and Napo Gabriel Sefuthi and Neo Ularius Ramasuku (Potgieter). Nosenga was convicted of nine counts of murder, six counts of attempted murder, and illegal possession of arms and ammunition. Discrepancies between his two applications for amnesty caused the commission to refuse his applications, in part because it "is not satisfied . . . that the Applicant has made a full and truthful disclosure of all material facts related to the incident" (Miller). Sefuthi and Ramasuku murdered a man and claimed to be acting as a member of a task force of the Pan Africanist Congress, but the commission denied their appeal for amnesty because "we are not satisfied that the version of the Applicants can reasonably be true" (Potgieter). While there are numerous instances where the refusal to tell the truth resulted in the commission's denial of an amnesty appeal, there are countless instances of murderers who were granted amnesty because the commission was satisfied that they told the truth.

8. Much of Coetzee's fiction challenges the possibility of one person's understanding or articulation of another's experience. Magda, the narrator of *In the Heart of the Country,* is unable to reach any sort of understanding with her father, with his new lover, or even with her own lover. In *The Master of Petersburg,* Coetzee's Dostoevsky longs to know some truth about the deceased son he knows only through vague memories, second-hand reports, and a collection of his writing. In *Life and Times of Michael K,* Coetzee juxtaposes the narrative of the oppressed Michael K with the narrative of a doctor who, in spite of his good intentions, is a supporter of the system that oppresses Michael K. The doctor wants to understand why Michael K, whom he erroneously calls Michaels, refuses to eat. The doctor cannot understand Michael K any more than Dostoevsky can understand Pavel, or Magda can understand her father.

9. Sanders notes that in speaking for the victims of Empire, "there is always, necessarily, a contamination of *the* other with *an* other" (17).

10. In John 13.4–5, Jesus "rose from supper, laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel. Then he poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded" (*Oxford Annotated Bible*).

11. In Luke 7.37–38,

> a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was sitting at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to

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> wet his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.
> (*Oxford Annotated Bible*)

After "the ritual of the washing" in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the Magistrate "rub[s] her body with almond oil" (30).

12. Foucault's analysis of government-sponsored torture in *Discipline and Punish* asserts that in systems of punishment "it is always the body that is at issue," that punishment is "situated in a certain 'political economy' of the body," and that the "power relations" of a society "have an immediate hold upon [the body]; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" (25). The Magistrate longs to read these signs, to find and understand the marks left on the body of the girl, to understand something of the truth about her experience as a victim of Empire. Not only would this understanding allow him to speak for the barbarian girl, but it would also allow him to know something about the power of the government he serves and about the crimes for which he needs to be redeemed.

13. Freud remarks on his formulation of the theory of repression: "Everything that had been forgotten had in some way or other been distressing; it had been either alarming or painful or shameful by the standards of the subjects' personality" (17).

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The Gold Standard of Racial Identity in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* and *Passing*

Anthony Dawahare

> Gold? yellow, glittering, precious gold? . . .
> . . . . . .
> Thus much of this will make black white, foul fair,
> Wrong right, base noble, old young, coward valiant.
> —Shakespeare, *Timon of Athens* 4.3

> He's got a five-dollar gold piece for a stickpin and he got a ten-dollar gold piece on his watch chain and his mouf is jes' crammed full of gold teethes. Sho wisht it wuz mine.
> —Zora Neale Hurston, "The Gilded Six-Bits" (1014)

In the 1920s, many black writers established African American identity as one of the most significant issues to be addressed in the post–World War I period. Figures as diverse as W. E. B. Du Bois, A. Philip Randolph, Marcus Garvey, Alain Locke, James Weldon Johnson, and Jesse Fauset sought to define a new black identity that had appeared on the scene. They claimed that this New Negro belonged to a modern generation of black Americans shaped by the great events of the teens and twenties, from the Great Migration North, World War I, industrialism, urbanism, and nationalist liberation movements to the growth of internationalism following the Bolshevik Revolution. To be sure, black writers and activists were often at odds over just who the New Negro was. Garvey, for example, championed what he saw as the African character of the New Negro, while Randolph welcomed the arrival of a left-leaning, working-class New Negro. More often than not, however, definitions of the

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New Negro asserted that black Americans belonged to a unique race of human beings whose ancestry imparted a distinctive and invaluable racial identity and culture. The New Negro, it was claimed, had thrown off the yoke of racial prejudice that equated blackness with barbarism and was proud of his or her race and heritage. Many writers also believed that the New Negro's racial revaluation would help to produce a friendly revaluation of black Americans by white America. Writers heralded the arrival of the New Negro as the beginning of a new phase of American history in which the production of black culture would assist African Americans in winning respect long overdue in the US and abroad.

At the heart of New Negro discourses of the 1920s lies a crucial contradiction, one with important implications for discussions of black identity today. Writers claimed that the New Negro was shaped by modernity yet retained in some way a racial essence or character that preceded modernity. The New Negro was as old as Africa but as contemporary as a jazz club in urban Harlem; his racial soul was as ancient as Hughes's "dusky rivers" (*Voices* 155) yet as modern as the Garvey's Black Star Line ships ready to take the black diasporic masses back "home" to Africa. The New Negro had "the instinctive gift of the folk spirit" (Locke, "Negro Youth" 51), which did not preclude his evolution into a "new type of Negro . . . a city Negro" (Johnson 285). In a word, the "new" black identity also retained a good amount of an "old," premodern racial self.

Granted, not all Renaissance writers asserted that the New Negro was both premodern and modern. Exceptions stand out, such the black socialists who, for a time, rejected racial categories out of hand, and George Schuyler, who called the New Negro Renaissance the "Negro-Art Hokum" for claiming that black Americans are a distinct race somehow unaffected by "the same economic and social forces that mold the actions and thoughts of the white Americans" (1173).[1] But taken as a whole, New Negro discourses are caught between two poles: a notion of a premodern racial identity whose origins lie in ancient Africa and a concept of a modern self not exclusive to black Americans.

A number of current literary studies of the New Negro have all but laid to rest the racial essentialism predicated on concepts of a universal black "soul" or "blood" transmuted generationally. These critiques show how such essentialism reproduces fallacious premises integral to the "scientific" racism dating back to the period of slavery as well as to antiracist writers who problematically borrowed from these pseudoscientific dis-

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courses to argue against racism.[2] Barbara Foley, for example, details the ways in which writers of the Harlem Renaissance constructed a New Negro identity indebted to populist and nationalist conceptions of the "folk" popular at the time. For many New Negro writers, the black "folk" was tied by "blood" to the "soil" that warranted their equal place in the American republic. But as Foley demonstrates, notions of a soul or blood that putatively determines race and place can best be understood not as scientific but as rhetorical means that New Negro writers used, albeit problematically, to further civil rights. To be sure, Paul Gilroy's *Against Race* rightly refers to a current "crisis of raciology," largely the result of scientific research on human biology and DNA. Nor can one say that cultural transmission of premodern African or African American identities necessarily occurs or that it plays a central role in shaping identity in a highly standardized capitalist economy that has transformed all work and social relations. Even Countee Cullen, that very modern New Negro poet who lacked a personal memory or experience of Africa and was otherwise a critic of atavistic thinking, answers the question of what Africa is to him through recourse to essentialist rhetoric about the black self and its "dark blood damned within" (142).

Yet if we grant that the New Negro's racial identity was not the product of genetics or the holdover of some premodern black essence, then what were New Negro theorists pointing to when they laid claim to racial particularity? An answer to this question can be found, oddly enough, in the other side of the New Negro contradiction: modernity itself. In other words, the notion of a racial self is itself inseparable from the specific capitalist institutions and ideologies of modernity.

This is the view suggested by Nella Larsen's perspicacious novels *Quicksand* (1928) and *Passing* (1929). On the surface, perhaps, Larsen's novels may not seem the perfect place to explore the modernity of New Negro racial identity, since they are thematically about racially confused female "mulattas" who struggle with their "biracial" identities in an America sharply divided by the color line.[3] Nonetheless, both novels clearly represent racial identity as unavoidably shaped by the modern political economy of capitalism. Larsen's characters want to be bourgeois because they are afraid of being associated with the black working class, which has been exploited and defined as inferior. Their class identifications appear racial, however, because the institutions and ideologies of modern capitalism reify race as an indicator of self and social worth. As a result,

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wealth equals whiteness for Larsen's protagonists, and her novels expose how this reification of race operates by converting social relations of class into ontological concepts that appear natural and universal. Ultimately, her protagonists' fetishization of wealth and whiteness is motivated by the desire to become like money itself—the greatest fetish of all. Indeed, passing for white, Larsen suggests, allows the light-skinned mulatta to circulate like money. But the tragic endings of the novels also suggest that the overdetermination of racial values by the political economy of capitalism presents a no-win situation. Even the New Negro's revaluation of blackness as a source of pride appears in Larsen's work as a hopeless attempt to defy the reification of blackness as a sign of working-class inferiority. Larsen's novels suggest that the New Negro promoters of race pride, like their white-identified detractors, remain trapped by the capitalist semiotics of race.

The political economy of *Quicksand*

Larsen first explores racial identity as a function of the capitalist political economy in *Quicksand*. Significantly, the novel begins in a work site, Naxos, the Southern black college where Helga works as a teacher. Larsen represents this academic institution not as a locus of liberal humanism or social reform but as a capitalist industrial enterprise. Naxos is a "machine" that

> ruthlessly cut[s] all to a pattern, the white man's pattern. Teacher and students were subjected to the paring process, for it tolerated no innovations, no individualism. Ideas it rejected, and looked with open hostility on one and all who had the temerity to offer a suggestion or ever so mildly express a disapproval. Enthusiasm, spontaneity, if not actually suppressed, were at least openly regretted as unladylike or ungentlemanly qualities. (4)

Indeed, Larsen's depiction of Naxos (the reverse of *Saxon*) borrows from "the language of the factory and the ideology of Taylorism" (Carby 170). Under the Taylorism of Naxos, the individual employee's ideas or discontent are irrelevant or subject to disciplinary action in the micromanaged workplace. The ultimate purpose of the educational factory, as the renowned white preacher explains to both teachers and students, is to manufacture "Naxos products" that will have a specific use value and

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exchange value in the division of labor as exploited "hewers of wood and drawers of water" (3).

As is typical of employees in a capitalist workplace, Helga feels alienated from her role as a teacher—that is, from her commodified self. Feeling like a cog, "an insignificant part" (1) among "automatons" (12), she experiences social relations as reified: the relation between workers and employers is here conceptualized as a machine operating independently of human will.[4] At work she feels powerless; only when not working does she feel like herself. She enjoys her time alone in her campus apartment, "furnished with rare and intensely personal taste" (1), because it is a retreat from repressive and exploitative work relations legitimized by notions of discipline and service. Her experience illustrates Marx's observation that the worker

> only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He feels at home when he is not working, and when he is working he does not feel at home. His labour is therefore not voluntary, but coerced . . . it is merely a *means* to satisfy needs external to it. Its alien character emerges clearly in the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, labour is shunned like the plague.
>
> (Marx and Engels 274)

Her rebellion against alienation culminates in her quitting the job she conceptualizes as a "cage" (27).

But Helga cannot escape her commodification simply by quitting a job, for society itself is "a big general office" (54). Helga's problems are much bigger than she realizes. This vision of society as an office suggests a social reality that is administered according to the dictates of a capitalism that assigns black women the role of domestic service worker. Thadious Davis notes that the federal census for 1900 reported that 90 percent of black women were employed in personal and domestic services. In the 1910 census for New York—that Northern locus putative of freedom to which Helga flees—70 percent "of all black female workers . . . were employed in domestic and personal services, and . . . of the remainder, the majority worked as servants and waitresses, with the rest either laundresses, dressmakers, or seamstresses" (84). Opportunities for black women had changed little by 1920: 63.1 percent were employed in domestic services and 30 percent in semiskilled jobs (Greenberg 23–24). In Manhattan,

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nearly 70 percent of black women worked in domestic and personal services. After leaving Naxos, Helga confronts the same repressive strictures of a racist and sexist division of labor in Chicago. She despairs when she realizes that, as an educated and skilled black woman worker, she cannot find employment without references for domestic service. An unwanted commodity in a bad economy, Helga "felt the smallness of her commercial value" (35).

But the question of Helga's "commercial value" is not limited to the workplace. Hazel Carby aptly notes, "As a woman, she is at the center of a complex process of exchange. Money was crucial to Larsen's narrative, structuring power relations, controlling social movement, and defining the boundaries of Helga's environment" (172). As a mulatta, Helga has a double symbolic value in this process of exchange, especially for men: her light skin bestows respectability, and her blackness signifies hypersexuality. Her value to men oscillates accordingly. As James Vayle becomes increasingly assimilated to Naxos and its mission to serve primarily the white bourgeoisie, his discomfort with her "racially" scandalous origins and "lack of acquiescence" (7) with the Naxos machine grows, making her less than an ideal marriage partner. But he doesn't break off his engagement with her, because he finds her "ancient [sexual] appeal" (8) useful. Similarly, Robert Anderson insults her by incorrectly assuming that a respectable family background imparted to her "dignity and breeding" and "good stock" (21), which makes her a valuable asset to Naxos, but once she proves an unsuitable "marriage" partner for the hypocritical educational institution, he also treats her as a sexual object, in this case at Travenor's party. Not surprisingly, she "savagely slap[s]" (108) Anderson, which not only punishes him for making her feel "belittled and ridiculed" but also repays the symbolic slap she felt when devalued at the employment agency in Chicago (33). And, of course, she resists being objectified as a "decoration," a "curio," a "peacock" (73) as a means of "advancing the social fortunes of the Dahls of Copenhagen" (68) and fulfilling the sexual needs and narcissism of Axel Olsen. Indeed, Helga experiences Axel Olsen's desire to possess her as akin to being reduced to chattel. She tells him, "I'm not for sale. Not to you. Not to any white man. I don't at all care to be owned" (87). His painting of her underscores how he replicates the racist fantasy about black women as jezebels or, as Helga puts it, "some disgusting sexual creature" (89). Her refusal of his marriage proposal parallels her resignation from the college: both actions seek a

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way out of the stifling social roles defined for women, particularly black or mulatta women.

Yet it may be difficult for some readers to see Helga mainly as a commodified subject trying to dodge her class enemies. After all, she seems so bourgeois. While staying at Anne Gray's middle-class house in Harlem, she thinks to herself:

> Some day she planned to marry one of those alluring brown or yellow men who danced attendance on her. Already financially successful, any one of them could give to her the things which she had come now to desire, a home like Anne's, cars of expensive makes such as lined the avenue, clothes and furs from Bendel's and Revillon Frères', servants, and leisure. (45)

Given the racialization of class, the lighter pigmentation of these prospective mates is also suggestive of Helga's upward ambitions. In another passage we read that on arriving in Copenhagen, "She took to luxury as the proverbial duck to water" (67) and realizes that ever since childhood "she had wanted, not money, but the things which money could give, leisure, attention, beautiful surroundings. Things. Things. Things." Indeed, many of her desires are bourgeois and remain so until the final tragic page of the novel.

But it is precisely the contradiction between her alienated, commodified self and her bourgeois desires that makes this novel so interesting. While she takes flight from debilitating relationships in Naxos, Chicago, Harlem, and Copenhagen, Helga does not escape the reified mode of thinking integral to racism. Her conceptualization of her problems and their solutions replicates the ways the economies of slavery and capitalism produced racial ideologies that took physical qualities—genitalia, hair texture, skin coloring, skull size—as indicators of a human being's economic function and market value. As Emmanuel Wallerstein puts it, "What we mean by racism is that set of ideological statements combined with that set of social practices which have had the consequence of maintaining a high correlation of ethnicity and work-force allocation over time" (78). The reification of black people (itself an ideological trope [Gates 1579]), as "naturally" fit to be slaves, domestics, unskilled workers, etc. is the greatest consequence of what I refer to as racial reification. Racial reification transforms a social relation between the capitalist/slaveholding class and a section of the working class into a relation between ontological beings

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conceptualized as "whites" and "blacks" (or related concepts, such as Caucasian and Negro).[5] Larsen's protagonist has internalized this transformation of an economic category—black *labor* value—into a metaphysical concept—*black* value. Simply put, for her, black means poor, enslaved, and despised and white means wealthy, free, and loved. Larsen's choice of Hughes's poem "Cross" as an epigraph for the novel reveals this reification of color at the outset. The poem associates dying in a "shack" with being "black," and dying in a "fine big house" with being "white." As a mulatta, Helga is hung on this "cross": she is too optically black to pass for white and therefore cannot escape the black/shack or black/worker equations.

Crucially, at the root of Helga's ambivalence about her black identity is a social system predicated on multilevel class inequalities. Her recurring sense of entrapment is certainly well founded, since the social quicksand into which she sinks is that of a Jim Crow America whose class, color, and gender lines extend from South to North. E. Franklin Frazier documents the ways in which restrictive covenants among white property owners, landlords, realtors, and the Federal Housing Authority during the 1920s resulted in the segregation of the waves of Southern black migrants into select Northern neighborhoods such as Chicago's South Side and Harlem (260). Such segregation gave landlords the opportunity to raise rents, neglect maintenance, and as Cheryl Greenberg puts it, hold "black tenants essentially captive" (29). On top of legal segregation and discrimination in the North, racist whites periodically enforced color and class lines through violent actions from riots to lynchings. "Lines of segregation actually hardened in the 20s," Greenberg contends (15).

In Harlem, which Locke dubbed the New Negro "Mecca," social conditions were particularly oppressive. Gilbert Osofsky identifies the 1920s as the decade in which Harlem became a slum (135). High rents, low wages, and overcrowding led to a variety of problems such as poverty, illness, and premature death. Between 1923 and 1927, Osofsky notes,

> Harlem's death rate, for all causes, was 42 percent in excess of the entire city. Twice as many Harlem mothers died in childbirth as did mothers in other districts. . . . Infant mortality in Harlem . . . was 111 per thousand live births; for the city, 64.5. (141)

Post–World War I America was a hard and highly dangerous place for millions of black Americans.

These conditions and their ideological justifications propel Helga to

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flee from the black working class and, just as importantly, from being associated with the black working class. By identifying with the bourgeoisie, she tries to break the signifying chain that links her to the black working class, a response typical of the black middle-to-upper classes interested in maintaining respectability in a white world (Frazier 287, 299). This is why she dislikes race talk among her Naxos colleagues, Harlem friends, and Copenhagen relatives and acquaintances. As she thinks in Harlem before embarking for Copenhagen, "Why . . . should she be yoked to these despised black folk" (55). And in Copenhagen, seduced by the wealth and attention she receives, Helga vows never to return to America. She is charmed by the working-class district in Copenhagen, which was free from "that untidiness and squalor which she remembered as the accompaniment of poverty in Chicago, New York, and the Southern cities of America" (75); in her frame of reference, it appears bourgeois. And shortly after she receives Anne's letter announcing her marriage to Dr. Anderson, Helga muses on what would have became of her if she had never left Harlem and instead married Anderson herself. She would be "Working everyday of [her] life. Chattering about the race problem" (81). Were she to return to America, her fate would be that of other

> Negroes [who] were allowed to be beggars only, of life, of happiness, of security . . . where if one had Negro blood, one mustn't expect money, education, or, sometimes, even work whereby one might earn one's bread. (82)

And yet Helga cannot escape the reification of blackness. She is estranged from her color, which, as Georg Lucács notes of estranged and commodified human activity and attributes in general, "must go its own way independently of [her] just like any consumer article" (87). Thus the black "consumer article" resurfaces in a Copenhagen vaudeville house with the face of black minstrelsy, stirring shame and a sense of betrayal that her white family and acquaintances had been "invited to look upon something in her which she had hidden away and wanted to forget" (83)—the semiotics of American racism.

Perhaps Helga's most desperate attempt to free herself from class/racial crucifixion is her marriage to a Southern reverend, Mr. Pleasant Green, whose name evokes a kind of utopian fantasy and the bourgeois value of marrying for money. The marriage is a way of finally consummating her sexual desires without feeling belittled or somehow beneath her husband.

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Described as unrefined and unattractive (he is "fattish yellow" [115], "rattish yellow" [118], and has dirty fingernails [121]), Green does not initially make her feel inferior in terms of her class background and race. In other words, Helga ensconces herself in his Southern working-class community as a way to escape the reifying gaze of both racist whites and bourgeois blacks, who made her feel black and poor. Her attempt to identify with Green and his flock is, in essence, motivated by the same racist attitudes as her identification with the bourgeoisie: her desire not to be perceived by people as the inferior black working-class other.

Helga's marriage to Green does not overcome her internalized racism. Sex with this black working-class man only temporarily gives her an "anaesthetic satisfaction for her senses" (118). Before long, she wants to bourgeoisify her home and female neighbors. Her fear of being identified with the black working class reasserts itself in her attempt to conceal the poverty, class status, and racialization of black women, especially when she counsels the women not to wear the racially and class-coded sunbonnets or aprons on Sundays because, one can assume, they would look like domestics—too conventionally black (119). She does not transcend the racial ideology that Hughes describes as deeply rooted in the minds of the black middle class:

> the word white comes to be unconsciously a symbol of all the virtues. It holds for the children [of the black bourgeoisie] beauty, morality, and money. The whisper of "I want to be white" runs silently through their minds. (*Voices* 306)

Not surprisingly, her contempt for the black working class grows when she fails to uplift her neighbors and she herself becomes increasingly proletarianized. She must perform more and more domestic work in exchange for her sexual satisfaction—another economic transaction—especially when she has children. Helga comes to view the labor "cost" (116) (to use her own metaphor) of having a sex life as an unequal exchange, since she must pay dearly with her body—the double labor of producing children and maintaining a well-kept home. Having reached her final crisis, Helga thinks to herself, "She had ruined her life. . . . She had, to put it as brutally as anyone could, been a fool. . . . And she had paid for it. Enough. More than enough" (133). This sense of paying too much—a repetition of her observation on the novel's first page that she "gave willingly and unsparingly of herself with no apparent return"—

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grounds the realization that she has not succeeded in escaping her "fate" as a black woman. She too is exploited.

As the economic boundaries between herself and her black neighbors erode, she redoubles the ideological boundary by blaming them for their subjugation. "She hated their raucous laughter, their stupid acceptance of things, and their unfailing trust in 'de Lawd'" (134). She especially criticizes their belief in a compensatory afterlife, in the "sweet promises of mansions in the sky by and by . . . Pie in the sky." Instead of extending her recognition of injustice against herself to the other black women of her class, she plans her escape and lapses into an "easy and pleasant" reverie about "freedom and cities, about clothes and books, about the sweet smell of Houbigant and cigarettes in softly lighted rooms filled with inconsequential chatter and laughter and sophisticated tuneless music" (135)—a dream she will attain "by and by." Larsen here makes explicit the nature of Helga's interpellation: freedom is defined as possessing commodities and attending inconsequential social gatherings. This bourgeois fantasy—where "softly lighted rooms" obscure the horrors of exploitation, sexism, and racism, where class contradictions vanish in puffs of cigarette smoke, and where "sophisticated tuneless [white] music" replaces the weary blues—is Helga's response to history. Significantly, her bourgeois fantasies precisely echo the religious fantasies of the black working-class characters: seeking places free from the ravages of racism and capitalism, both imagine "mansions in the sky by and by." In Helga's dream, freedom for the commodified worker is to be the white commodity purchaser with unlimited cash. It is the dream to possess "Things. Things. Things" instead of being counted as a thing, the hope of being an eternal consumer rather than the exploited producer.

Passing through the money economy

In *Passing* Larsen addresses Lukács's seminal question about the capacity of "the commodity structure to penetrate society in all its aspects and to remould it in its own image" (85) by depicting characters whose identities approximate the money form of the commodity. Here money is not just a means of and imaginary escape from commodification but also shapes the most fetishistic form of black identity—the passer for white.

To be sure, the influence of the money economy on racial identification also operates in *Quicksand,* where Larsen first establishes the mon-

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etization of color, depicting African Americans in a spectrum of colors, with lighter skin embodying higher value. "Marveling at the gradations within this oppressed race of hers," Helga notes,

> There was a sooty black, shiny black, taupe, mahogany, bronze, copper, gold, orange, yellow, peach, ivory, pinky white, pastry white. . . . Africa, Europe, perhaps a pinch of Asia, in a fantastic motley of ugliness and beauty, semibarbaric, sophisticated, exotic, were here. (59–60)

While the gradations do not correspond exactly to a hierarchy of racial value, the description of skin colors moves from "sooty black" to "pastry white," corresponding to the movement from Africa to Europe, from "ugliness" to "beauty," and from the "semibarbaric" to the "sophisticated, exotic." Moreover, the color spectrum here encodes the economic origins of racial value. The "sooty" blackness suggests industrial production, associating a besotted working class with ugliness and semibarbarism. In contrast, "pastry white" evokes a "higher" class associated with Europe, beauty, and sophistication. We have here, in other words, the reification of color in relation to the social relations of capitalism. This passage helps to clarify why Helga associates blackness with dirt, labor, and barbarism.

An association of gold with whiteness and thus with value is central to the depiction of major characters in both novels. *Quicksand*'s Helga has "skin like yellow satin" and is "radiant" (2), and this gilded mulatta has bourgeois desires and tastes, from oriental silks to expensive cars and furs, all of a piece in her imagination. Similarly, the financially independent Anne Grey, though not a mulatta, has the "face of a golden Madonna" (45) and a bourgeois "aesthetic sense" (44). Her "brownly beautiful" (45) but "golden" face suggests that gold has the power to "make black white," as Timon of Athens says in the epigraph to this essay (and as Marx quotes in *Capital* 229).

The association of whiteness with money in its golden incarnation is especially plain in the depiction of the mulatta protagonist of *Passing*, Clare Kendry. Irene, for example, reflects on Clare's appearance at a Negro Welfare League dance:

> Clare, exquisite, golden, fragrant, flaunting, in a stately gown of shining black taffeta, whose long, full skirt lay in graceful folds about her slim golden feet; her glistening hair drawn smoothly

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> back into a twist at the nape of her neck; her eyes sparkling like dark jewels. (203)

"Golden," "shining," "glistening," Clare is depicted more as a fetish—replete with jewels for eyes—than a human being. Her name, a variant of *clear,* is etymologically associated with "brightly shining" and "brilliant," two qualities of gold; and from Irene's perspective, even her laugh is akin to "the ringing of a delicate bell fashioned of a precious metal" (151). Perhaps her literary prototype is *The Great Gatsby*'s Daisy, the "golden girl" with a "voice full of money" (127).[6]

As a fetish, Clare's value seems both clear and, as Irene notes, "mysterious and concealing" (161). She appears intrinsically valuable, but she conceals her family origins in the working class. Her white father was a janitor; as a child she worked as an errand girl for a dressmaker, and later, after her father's death in a saloon fight, as a domestic for her white relatives. Clare also learns from her white adoptive aunts that her role in the division of labor is to be a worker, one of the "daughters of Ham" condemned "to sweat" doing "hard labor" (159). As a light-skinned mulatta, she can opt out of the black working class by passing for white.

Like money itself, Clare's whiteness/golden appearance bears no trace of the social relations between black and white workers in the division of labor at the basis of the creation of wealth in America. In other words, the dazzling figure of Clare conceals not only her class background but also the exploitation of labor in general and black labor in particular. "There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism," notes Walter Benjamin (256). It is no wonder that, as her racist husband notes, Clare "wouldn't have a nigger maid around her for love or money" (172), presumably because she would be a reminder of the barbarism of the racist labor division.

Like money, which needs to "possess the same uniform quality . . . [and to be] divisible at will" (Marx 184), Clare's identity is based on abstraction. Her white body is remarkable not because of its particularity but because it functions socially as an abstract symbol of value. She is able to pass because white people symbolically "possess the same uniform quality" and whiteness itself (as an ideological trope) is "divisible at will" without reducing its value. Similarly, regardless of the variety of social, political, and cultural factors definitive of human identity, black people are abstracted as a race. But if both whiteness and blackness are abstracted, it is only

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the abstraction of whiteness that functions as the signifier of money. The black/worker equation forecloses the signification of blackness with the product of labor under capitalism, namely, capital. Only whiteness signifies wealth, since the bourgeoisie have historically and mainly been white in America and have had the power to disseminate the derogatory fictions of color that function to pit black and white workers against each other. The whiteness/wealth equation elides, of course, the exploitation of the white working class and white poverty, but it is precisely this elision that allows Helga and Clare to assume that whiteness is like money.

Put another way, Clare resists the commodification of blackness by undergoing the metamorphosis of the commodity into its money form. "In the money-form," Marx notes, "all commodities look alike" (204). Clare conceals her *relative* form of value, her depreciated black body, and assumes the *equivalent* form of value, that is, the money form. This allows her to attain the highest form of commodity fetishism: she becomes the symbol that appears to have intrinsic, not relative, value. She becomes the universal equivalent of value associated with whiteness that functions as the measure of all things—money.

Passing is a way to circulate like money, to become acceptable everywhere. It allows Clare to transgress the color line to acquire more of those "Things. Things. Things" that Helga hoped would displace the social significance of her blackness. And as a money fetish, Clare is said to pass from hand to hand and make everyone feel the richer—at least for a while. At the Negro Welfare League dance, we get "glimpses of Clare in the whirling crowd, sometimes dancing with a white man, more often with a Negro" (204). At Irene's tea party, Clare is the prized money commodity that Felise Freeland wants to take home. Echoing the general perception of Clare as a desirable commodity, Felise tells Irene, "I want her for a party. Isn't she stunning today?" (220).

Clare's power to activate the white/bourgeois fantasies of her friends and acquaintances is so compelling as even to disarm the otherwise critical Brian, Irene's husband, who apparently falls in love with Clare. A World War I veteran bitter over the US government's broken promises of freedom and democracy in the "hellish place" of America (232), Brian finds in Clare a way to live beyond the color line without moving to Brazil. Through her he lives a fantasy where being black is not restrictive, and the black man is the desired object of the white female. Brian's attraction to Clare follows the logic outlined by Frantz Fanon on "the man of color

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and the white woman": "By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white love. I am loved like a white man. I am a white man" (63).

Irene, of course, is the character most affected by what Judith Butler calls Clare's transgressive "risk-taking," which "alternately entrances Irene and fuels her moral condemnation of Clare with renewed ferocity" (169). Indeed, the radiance of Clare's money character—its social desirability and ability to circulate freely—is so powerful that it consistently obscures her real character: her extreme self-centeredness (*Passing* 210). "It's funny about 'passing,'" Irene notes. "We disapprove of it and at the same time condone it. It excites our contempt and yet we rather admire it" (185–86). So when Irene makes up her mind to break off her relationship with her old friend who is "just a shade too good looking"(198), she loses her determination on seeing her, as if mesmerized:

> Looking at the woman before her, Irene Redfield had a sudden inexplicable onrush of affectionate feeling. Reaching out, she grasped Clare's two hands in her own and cried with something like awe in her voice: "Dear God! But aren't you lovely, Clare!" (194)

Deborah McDowell identifies this and other passages as expressive of Irene's vaguely conscious homosexual attraction to Clare. Her queer affections are "inexplicable" since they are unexplainable in terms of the heterosexual and bourgeois values Irene otherwise fights to protect (xxvi–xxvii). While Irene's attraction to Clare can be viewed as homosexual, it is also indicative of the ways in which the embodiments of economic value are objects of libidinal investment by both male and female subjects in bourgeois society. Money is sexy in both *Quicksand* and *Passing,* and its possessor is the object of general desire. Irene also grasps Clare, one may add, because Clare stimulates her own boundless acquisitiveness. Yet Clare, as the idealized object, activates Irene's desire to despoil her as well: what the envious Irene wants but cannot have, she shall destroy.

Irene's relationship with Clare also underscores the ways in which passing is a "hazardous business" (157), and not only because it is a form of counterfeit circulation that may reveal the "dirty Nigger" (238) underneath the gold leaf.[7] More importantly, Clare's passing for white within the Redfield home reinforces the devaluation of Irene's already commodified blackness. Whiteness as the universal equivalent makes Irene recognize her relative form of value in relation to Clare. Irene grows

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increasingly dissatisfied with her black middle-class life, for example, when her friend comes back into her life. She begins to see that her own desire for "security of place and substance" (190) comes at a cost to her ability to feel and live life more deeply (195). Even before the suspicion of her husband's affair with Clare dawns on her, Irene intuits the logic of the racist marketplace of human value, where a black woman is worth less than a white woman. Thus, while expressing her dissatisfaction that her husband has invited Clare to the tea party and noting that he is unconcerned about her view of the matter, Irene thinks, "his gaze was on her, but in it there was some quality that made her feel that at that moment she was no more to him than a pane of glass through which he stared. At what? She didn't know, couldn't [yet] guess" (216). Irene's image conjures up "the shop-windows [that] threw out a blinding radiance" (146) that she peers into on her visit to Chicago; she experiences herself as the shop window through which her husband peers at the "hot" commodity of Clare, whose golden color throws out a radiance that blinds Brian as well as others. And once she understands the source of her feelings, she is uncertain whether or not "she had ever truly known love" (235). She comes to realize that "she didn't count. She was, to him, only the mother of his sons. That was all. Alone she was nothing. Worse. An obstacle" (221).[8]

After this realization, Irene wants to restore the security of her middle-class home and marriage by taking Clare out of circulation. She hopes that Clare's fear of discovery or divorce from her wealthy white husband will constrain her. (Significantly, Clare's husband, John Bellew, made his fortune digging gold in South America and maintains it as an international banking agent.) She toys with the idea of informing on Clare as a way of getting rid of her, but decides to keep Bellew ignorant of his wife's racial identity; knowledge of Clare's "counterfeit" identity would result in divorce, thus freeing her to circulate as she wished.

As she grows increasingly desperate, however, Irene fantasizes about taking Clare off the market by killing her. "If Clare should die!" Irene reflects, "Then—Oh, it was vile! To think, yes, to wish that! . . . the thought stayed with her" (228). This murderous wish is fulfilled at a party, the symbolic marketplace of the novel, where Clare (once again) is depicted as "a vital glowing thing, like a flame of red and gold" (239). As Jacquelyn McLendon notes (108), Irene rehearses her murder of Clare by opening the window, throwing out the butt of her cigarette, and "watching the tiny sparks drop slowly down to the white ground below" (Larsen 238).

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Added to the novel's constellation of images for Clare—gold, yellow, fire—are these sparks. Significantly, both the sparks and Clare "drop," just as Irene, Clare's competitor for Brian, had previously dropped in value. After fainting from realizing the horror of her action, then, Irene is "dimly conscious" of what we assume are Brian's "strong arms lifting her up" (242). Thus the novel ends when Irene takes Clare out of circulation as a way of raising her own (black) value for Brian.

Irene's disposing of the white fetish in no way means that her problems are over, any more than Helga's move to a Southern black community solves her dilemma. In Larsen's work the commodification of black women and the reification of race under capitalism seem inescapable: the sought-after transcendence of racism through bourgeois identification is itself based on capitalist premises. Needless to say, her mulattas' motives are rooted in the existence of an exploited black working class. One cannot, Larsen suggests, be bourgeois like those always-rich white people who die in "big fine house[s]" without a working class to produce all those fine houses. From this perspective, Helga, Clare, and Irene evade the inherent social relations of capitalism by wanting the impossible: to be black yet in no way associated with the exploited black working class, and when this fails, to escape racism by becoming bourgeois/white.

Larsen's critical portrayal of racial categorization and politics as inseparable from the money economy is unparalleled in the New Negro Renaissance. Unlike so many of her contemporaries who were immersed in the racialist and ethnic nationalist discourses of the post–World War I period, she was able to see both race pride and old-fashioned racism as idolatrous, since both worship what is social and historical—race itself—as if it were a metaphysical reality. Her likening of race thinking to fetishism, and fetishism to the Gold Standard, situates her closer to the proletarian writers of the 1930s, for whom race was an "old myth" generated by capitalism (Hughes, "Too Much" 102–03). Thus, the most radical implication of *Quicksand* and *Passing* is that the money economy itself must be abolished before its reifying ideologies and practices can come to an end. While some readers misrecognize and dismiss such an implication as excessively pessimistic, I see in Larsen a social critic whose work challenges the hollow optimism of bourgeois reformism and its race talkers.

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Notes

1. See also Owen and Randolph. For an extended analysis of competing political definitions of the New Negro, see Dawahare, Foley, and Maxwell.

2. In *The Souls of Black Folk,* for example, Du Bois hypostatizes black identity with claims to a "Negro blood" and "soul" generative of "innate love of harmony and beauty" and "a message for the world" (39). His 1897 essay "The Conservation of Races," now included in the Blight and Gooding-Williams edition of *The Souls of Black Folk* (1997), explicitly endorses nineteenth-century pseudoscientific race theories. For a discussion of Du Bois's essentialism, see Sundquist.

3. I use *mulatta* only by default, since its origins and meaning stem from racist, biologically determinist conceptions of human identity imported by the Spanish conquistadors and subsequently adopted by American slaveholders. *Biracial* does little to correct this, since it frequently assumes that race is somehow biological.

4. I am drawing on Georg Lukács's theory of reification.

5. Jules-Marcel Monnerot, a Martiniquan surrealist writer, comments indirectly on a similar reifying process that converts economic relations and values into moral values as a way to dominate blacks under French rule:

> Shake the principle notions of bourgeois morality and you hear the jangle of money . . . all the words expressing these notions ALSO have—or have had—a mercantile and financial sense . . . DUTY means DEBT, a perfectly Christian notion of a debt man has never finished repaying. This duty, which primarily profits the holder of obligations, is itself called OBLIGATION. Its fulfillment, the ethical manual tells us, confers a VALUE on the subject. . . . Put obligation, value and good in the plural and you immediately see what is going on. (61)

6. I thank James Smethurst for calling my attention to the parallel between Daisy's and Clare's moneyed voices.

7. Of course, the unchallenged assumption is that the authentic self of the mulatta is black, and passing for white is dissimulation. Thus Irene doesn't tell John Bellew that his wife is black out of "race loyalty" (255). She could logically have come to the opposite conclusion: the mulatta should tell John out of white race loyalty.

8. *Passing* is a precursor to that other short masterpiece of the Harlem Renaissance, Zora Neale Hurston's "The Gilded Six-Bits," which depicts the

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corrosive effects of money (as a fetishization of bourgeois whiteness) on relationships—from Joe Banks's ritual of "chunkin'" silver dollars at his wife to Otis D. Slemmons's own "chunkin'" of gilded coins at Missie May.

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Jokes, Fiction, and Lorrie Moore

Robert Chodat

The opening sentences of Lorrie Moore's "You're Ugly, Too" present a superbly comic picture of the contemporary intellectual faced with the arid, earnest culture of middle America:

> You had to get out of them occasionally, those Illinois towns with the funny names: Paris, Oblong, Normal. Once, when the Dow Jones dipped two hundred points, the Paris paper boasted a banner headline: NORMAL MAN MARRIES OBLONG WOMAN. They knew what was important. They did! But you had to get out once in a while, even if it was just across the border to Terre Haute, for a movie. (*Like Life* 67)

It is passages such as this, with its spunky prose and keen sense of the absurd, that have made Moore one of the most widely read writers in contemporary fiction. Yet the sort of humor exhibited here has not appealed to everyone. This is not because it betrays intellectual "elitism" or exhibits symptoms of what, since the story was first published in 1989, has become known as "blue state" snobbery. As we know from the rest of the story, Moore takes aim at folly with an eminently egalitarian eye, and urbanites escape her wit no more than yokels. Rather, the question that has dominated the critical response to Moore has been how legitimate or probing her humor ultimately is, regardless of its target. Most of the discussion of her work has come in the form of book reviews in newspapers and magazines, and the question commentators most frequently pose concerns what we might call the moral weight of Moore's humor. Are the one-liners of her stories merely, as a reviewer for the *Christian Science Monitor* wrote about *Like Life,* the collection in which "You're Ugly, Too" first appeared, an "entertaining" feature of her work, something

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"distracting" us from deeper concerns ("Lives on a Short-Story Roller Coaster")? Is she only interested in furnishing us, as another reviewer wrote in a review of *Like Life,* with "enough verbal glibness to provide material for all the stand-up comics in Los Angeles" (Rubin)? Are all her stories simply about "articulate career women quipping their way out of pain" (Cryer)?

One way to answer these critical questions would be to appeal to later Moore stories such as "People Like That Are the Only People Here," a powerful story from *Birds of America* that, though not without its comedy, is written in a more somber register than "You're Ugly, Too." Yet while it may be true that such later texts elicit fewer chuckles from readers, recourse to Moore's later work is not the only way to rebut her critics. I want to offer here an extended reading of "You're Ugly, Too" in order to suggest that, as early as her second collection of short stories, Moore engages the moral and aesthetic questions that readers sometimes pose about her work. Anyone, that is, interrogating the moral weight of the comedy in "You're Ugly, Too" must confront a major complication—namely, that such questions are at the heart of the text itself. As I'll be arguing here, it is a layered, self-reflexive text that thematizes and questions its own dark comedy in a way that most reviewers, favorable and skeptical alike, have failed to notice.

Moreover, the self-reflexiveness of "You're Ugly, Too" extends not only to a consideration of laughter and comedy but can also be seen as part of a wider act of self-reflection on fiction generally. To ask questions about the particular form of humor on display in "You're Ugly, Too" is also to ask questions about the nature of storytelling itself. Not only, in other words, does the text initiate critical questions about the legitimacy and depth of Moore's humor, but it also places us smack in the middle of debates about the ontological status of fiction. What does a fictional story mean? What kind of reality does a fiction represent? What sort of world does it depict, and how is it related to other worlds that are said to exist? Moore has never been explicitly preoccupied with philosophical questions; her work is not intellectualized in the manner, say, of Richard Powers or Jonathan Franzen, her close contemporaries. And I make no claim that these questions about the ontological status of fiction were floating around in her head as she was writing "You're Ugly, Too." But her literary fusion of tone, plot, narrative perspective, and character development does have philosophical implications, and to miss them can lead to

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a misunderstanding of the laughter that plays so prominent a role in her writing.

Another reason for untangling the fictional layers and philosophical implications of Moore's story is that it may help us to define her place in contemporary comic fiction generally. In his discussion of another great contemporary humorist, T. C. Boyle, John W. Aldridge has identified Moore's work as "satirical realism," to be contrasted with the "gothic fabulist" work of Boyle (117). This contrast is helpful, and one need only think of Donald Barthelme or David Foster Wallace to recognize that Boyle is in fact representative of a powerful strain of American fiction written in the last few decades. But this contrast is also underdeveloped, and one of my goals here is to explore, in both practical and theoretical terms, what it might mean. What is most striking about "You're Ugly, Too," I'll be arguing, is the ways in which Moore inscribes Aldridge's distinction within the drama and aesthetics of her own text. It is a story on the knife-edge between two forms of joking and, in turn, two forms of fiction, exploring the logical and moral consequences of different forms of comedy. And this knife-edge, I want to claim, is part of what makes the humor of the story more than—or at least not merely—a laughing matter.

§

My claim for the philosophical interest of "You're Ugly, Too" is not meant to detract from its great humor. It is an immensely funny story. But why exactly is it funny? Is it possible to say? Spelling out why something is humorous is of course not always a popular thing to do. As James Wood has recently written, comedy, "like death and sex, is often awarded the prize of ineffability" (3). For many people, to stop and think carefully about why something is funny is to dissolve the very object of inquiry, and obviously a critical exposition cannot wholly compensate for a reader's failure to laugh in a more or less immediate way. But to think a little about humor is not the same as becoming humorless, and we should give up on critical self-reflection when faced with comedy no more than we should when faced with a poem or a story—an analogy to which I'll return.

Consider, for example, the opening passage of Moore's story, which I quoted a moment ago. The first striking thing about the paragraph is what the narrator calls the "towns with the funny names: Paris, Oblong,

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Normal." These are the names of actual towns in Illinois, near the Indiana border, but Moore has clearly sought out the most exquisitely eccentric ones, conveniently ignoring the garden-variety Sullivans and Charlestowns that in fact also lie near the state line. The humor of Oblong and Normal comes at two levels. First, the terms are adjectives, not proper nouns, used to describe persons and objects, not towns—implying that the setting of these opening pages is such a backwater that the residents cannot even give their places genuine place-names. Second, Normal and Oblong are comical because, when applied—now as adjectival hometowns—to actual people, we are confronted with terms that have been marvelously estranged from their ordinary semantics. Any man from a town called Normal cannot in fact be normal, and the physical properties conventionally denoted by *oblong* make the term evocatively absurd when applied to a woman, as if all the female citizens of the town were characters in some medieval allegory gone awry. (The semantic play of the headline is also, we should note, the first hint of the ill-fitting relations between men and women that occupy so much of the story's plot. The men in the text are in fact hopelessly normal, and Zoë is a kind of square peg.) In contrast to Normal and Oblong, the humor of the town name Paris lies not in its being an unplacelike place-name but in its being one of the most famous place-names in the world, incongruously far—in every sense of the term—from small-town Illinois. Whereas the adjectives are inadequate as proper place-names, Paris overcompensates: this town does not, as it were, deserve a name like Paris. The ironic juxtaposition of the sophisticated and the rustic that marks this use of Paris is carried over to the joke at the end of the paragraph, namely that Terre Haute would appear as a kind of cultural oasis, a refuge exotically "across the border" to which you retreat when "you had to get out." Taken together, the place-names of this opening paragraph are a perfect fit for a region characterized by what the narrator wants us to see as the fantastic insularity of the local residents. While world financial markets tumble ("the Dow Jones dipped two hundred points"), the townspeople are absorbed by local romance and familial continuity—oblivious, it would seem to, to the absurdity of their "banner headline."

A final feature we might remark about this opening passage is the narrator's voice. The first word of the story is *you,* and the paragraph continues throughout in the second person.[1] The effect of this is to draw the reader, here at the start, onto Zoë's side. The *you* marks the passage as

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familiar and conversational and tries to establish a kinship with the reader by addressing him or her as a confidant—someone in on the joke. We are encouraged to see ourselves as part of an "us" that stands in contrast to the provincial Midwestern towns, the simpletons bemusedly referred to in the third person: "They knew what was important. They did!" The second-person voice of the opening paragraph attempts to establish what Ted Cohen has referred to as the "intimacy" that a great deal of humor depends on, and which it often attempts to foster. Why, asks Cohen, do we want someone to hear a joke and find it funny? Is it because we wish each other well? "Well, maybe," he answers, "but at its core I do not think it is entirely a matter of altruism." It is, instead, a wish to have our feelings toward something—our *feel* of something, more than our discursive opinion about it—understood and shared. "I think that what you want is to *reach* me," says Cohen, "and therein to verify that you understand me, at least a little, which is to exhibit that we are, at least a little, alike" (29–30). This wish for intimacy, and the threat of its collapse, is at the heart of Zoë's story as a whole, and the use of the second person here in the first paragraph inscribes this desire into the text and the reader's relation to it.

After this opening paragraph, we might roughly classify the humor of "You're Ugly, Too" as occurring in one of two units. The first is the level of the sentence, specifically the use of crackling similes. To commemorate her daughter's buying a house, Zoë's mother sends her (through UPS) a box of old decorating magazines that she has saved over the years, which to Zoë feels "like getting her mother's pornography . . . her drooled-upon fantasies, the endless wish and tease that had been her life" (74). Visiting her sister's Manhattan high-rise on Halloween weekend, Zoë thinks to herself that it is "unnatural to live up in the sky like this, like birds that out of some wrong-headed derring-do had nested too high" (78). At a Halloween party thrown by her sister—Zoë's costume is a bonehead, "this thing that looks like a giant bone going through your head" (71)—she meets a man named Earl, who is wearing the costume of a naked woman. And as they talk on the balcony, Zoë notices at one point that "[h]is pubic hair slid over to one hip, like a corsage on a saloon girl" (86). Shortly after this, she observes that "[o]ne of his breasts had slipped under his arm, tucked there like a baguette" (87).

The second main unit of humor in the story is Zoë's crazed fantasies, which read like notes toward a stand-up routine or a Monty Python skit.

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The main plotline of the story follows Zoë's phone conversation with her younger sister Evan and her subsequent trip to visit Evan in New York. But the story moves by fits and starts, punctuated continually by comic digressions recounting the history of Zoë's years as a professor in the Midwest, her life as a home owner, and the revolving door of failed romantic interests. Thus, for example, Zoë's response to a student's question about which perfume she is using: "Room freshener" (68). Or her response to her sister when asked if she is "seeing anyone": "I'm seeing my house. I'm tending to it when it wets, when it cries, when it throws up" (73). Or her thoughts about the state of women in the small-town Midwest:

> You were supposed to be Heidi. You were supposed to lug goat milk up the hills and not think twice. Heidi did not complain. Heidi did not do things like stand in front of the new IBM photocopier, saying, "If this fucking Xerox machine breaks on me one more time, I'm going to slit my wrists." (70)

Or a few pages later, her anxiety about the oriental rug that she buys for her house, the symbols on which, according to the salesgirl, are supposed to mean Peace and Eternal Life: "What if they meant, say, *Bruce Springsteen?* And the more she thought about it, the more she became convinced she had a rug that said *Bruce Springsteen,*" and so she decides to return it (74–75). Or, to take one final example, her remark during a date with Murray Peterson, a fellow professor, and a married couple whose wife boasts flirtatiously to Murray that she was once able to memorize the first and last names of everyone at an entire dinner party:

> "I knew a dog that could do that," said Zoë with her mouth full. Murray and the wife looked and her with vexed and rebuking expressions, but the husband seemed suddenly twinkling and amused. Zoë swallowed. "It was a Talking Lab, and after about ten minutes of listening to the dinner conversation this dog knew everyone's name. You could say, 'Bring this knife to Murray Peterson,' and it would." (73)

It is next to this sort of imaginative flight that we are meant to recognize the impoverishment of language characteristic of Zoë's acquaintances. One sweet, lunky man describes in great detail his response to Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa,* which he then tersely sums up: "It just makes you shit"

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(73). When Earl enters the Halloween party in his naked-woman costume, one master of wit calls out across the room, "Va-va-va-voom" (82), and on the balcony, high above the streets of Manhattan, she overhears people trotting out the most hackneyed of comparisons: "how it looked like jewels, like bracelets and necklaces unstrung" (82). In all of these cases, the lifelessness of speech marks the world around Zoë as routinized and deadening. Moore does not express Eliotic despair or attempt cultural criticism, but the contrast between the vitality of Zoë's language and the persistently banal speech of the other characters is part of a confrontation with the contemporary wasteland.

I will come back to Zoë's comic similes and fantastical digression, but before that we should note a couple things about the story that bolster the comic moments I have cited here. For one thing, the humor in "You're Ugly, Too" is reinforced significantly by Moore's breakneck prose. Zoë does not slow down to mull over what she is going to say before a thought pops out of her mouth, and the third-person narrator of the story enacts this recklessness in the pace of the prose. To grasp just how distinctive Moore's prose is, recall the literary context out of which her short stories emerged, in particular the ways in which the short story had developed in the wake of minimalism. Like Carver, Beattie, and others, Moore typically favors a spare prose that is far from the complex syntax of more lyrical writers. No reader would mistake the sentences of these writers for the sentences of Faulkner, Woolf, or Morrison. But Moore's sentences are far more hectic than those of the minimalists and seldom exhibit the minimalists' guarded, melancholy restraint. "They knew what was important. They did!"—this sudden exclamation, from the opening paragraph of "You're Ugly, Too," is almost unimaginable in a Carver short story. Minimalism has sometimes been referred to as "TV fiction,"[2] but the analogy to television is more appropriate to a story such as "You're Ugly, Too" than to anything Carver or Beattie wrote. The sentences hop and bounce, cutting from one brief clause to the next in the way that images skip around playfully on a TV screen.

The metaphor of television and its quick-cut images applies to another feature bolstering the humor of "You're Ugly, Too": the story's presentation of character. The figures at whom Zoë and the narrator invite us to laugh belong as much to the realm of caricature as they do to the realm of character, with all the one-dimensionality and postmodern depthlessness that this implies. The students at Hilldale-Versailles (an-

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other place-name comically clashing Americana and sophistication) are uniformly uninformed; the men Zoë dates are uniformly incompetent; the guests at her sister's Halloween party in New York are uniformly self-seeking. And this depthlessness is reflected not only in the individual characters described but also in the way they associate with one another. It is notable, for instance, how few moments of genuine human warmth are depicted between characters in the story. Zoë's closest emotional bond appears to be with her sister, to whom she runs whenever small-town Illinois becomes too much to bear. But even this relationship is shown to be marked by comical miscommunication and deep misunderstanding. Zoë clearly feels estranged from Evan's Manhattan high-rise existence and her engagement to an independently wealthy man who spends his nights on the couch watching "fuzzy football." ("We haven't gotten cable yet," Evan explains. "Everything comes in fuzzy. Charlie just watches it that way" [79].) And if the choice of Earl is any indication, Evan is clearly oblivious to what Zoë would find attractive in a man. For the most part, the characters in the story are depicted as having too impoverished an emotional life to be able to see each other fully and to love each other. As Tony Tanner wrote in a discussion of Pynchon's *V.*, a text similarly full of narrative energy and antic comedy and similarly lacking any models of genuine love, one "cannot render great emotions in a comic-strip" (25).[3]

§

Thus far I have been tracing some of the reasons why so many readers laugh out loud when reading "You're Ugly, Too" in hopes of illuminating rather than deflating the humor of the story. I want now to turn to what at the start of my discussion I was calling the philosophical interest and moral weight of the text. There are a couple interrelated questions we could ask along these lines. The first concerns the motivation for the humor, and the second concerns what I've referred to as its self-reflexive quality.

First the motivation. Why does Zoë respond to the world in the joking way that she does? Various answers could be offered, but one of the leading ones would have to be the way in which, throughout the story, death—its presence, its threat, its inevitability—lurks just around the corner. It first appears when Zoë goes for an ultrasound to check a large and mysterious growth that doctors have found in her abdomen, and it

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reappears again and again. During the Halloween party in New York, for instance, Zoë plucks a hair from her chin in the bathroom while taking a break from conversation with Earl, and bodily decay is clearly at the center of her thoughts: "In the mirror above the sink she looked haggard beneath her bonehead, violet grays showing under the skin a plucked and pocky bird" (87). One of the most chilling moments of the text comes when Zoë tells Earl about a close friend, a cosmopolitan and educated young woman who had studied violin in Europe. After a failed romance with a conductor, the woman returns to her small hometown and tries to settle down with an ordinary softball-playing guy in Illinois, but after one particularly belittling episode with him—"You may think you're famous," he tells her in a bar surrounded by his drinking buddies, "but you're not *famous* famous" (89)—she goes home and shoots herself in the head. Zoë grimly refers to this anecdote as a "love story" (90). It is not for nothing, in this context, that Zoë spends her afternoon in New York going to a movie with the title of *Death by Number* (81).

One could object here that the motivation I've been describing is misguided, that the signs of death that crisscross the story are not laughing matters. Yet Moore's comedy should not be taken as a sign of mere frivolity. As Cohen has suggested, death is the ultimate power, and the idea of it can be "terrifying, numbing, incomprehensible," but laughing about it can "return a kind of balance" (44). As when Jews in the 1930s and 40s made jokes about Germans, the very ability to speak about and laugh at a reigning power is proof that "it hasn't numbed you completely, hasn't robbed you of everything." Moore's comedy escapes the charge of frivolity in part because she shows a clear-eyed awareness of an "ultimate power" and an "incomprehensible" abyss. She is not a reincarnation of P. J. Wodehouse. Aldridge is correct to say that although Moore is "often described as a comic writer," her materials are "altogether unfunny," and he is also right to associate her work with Yeats's famous line about "gaiety transfiguring all that dread" (110). As in the well-known joke that Zoë describes as "terribly, terribly funny" (77)—the punch line of which gives the story its title—the humor of "You're Ugly, Too" emerges in part from an existential terror and from the main character's desperate attempt to ask, like the patient, for a "second opinion."[4]

Understanding the motivation for the humor of the story is not, however, the same as justifying the particular forms it takes, and my mention of the title leads us to the self-reflexive quality of the story's humor.

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First of all, we should make explicit an important feature of the story's humor that, up to now, I have more or less left unstated—namely, that the comedy of the story comes predominantly in the form of jokes. The obvious is worth stating: the similes and anecdotal digressions that make up so much of the comic texture of the story are specifically linguistic. The humor is not slapstick or physical, and it is seldom situational. It arises from Zoë's particular kind of linguistic gusto. And it is through this verbal gusto that Zoë is presented as a kind of storyteller, one who competes in many ways with the narrator who writes the text as a whole. She does not spin out her stories into full-fledged plots, but her jokes—be they in the form of brief anecdotes or even briefer similes—are clearly the germ of longer narratives. Like the larger story of which they are a part, they are all ways of saying "imagine this": imagine that Zoë really did receive her mother's pornography; imagine that Earl's fake breast really was a baguette tucked under his arm; imagine that a dog really could learn names at a dinner party; imagine that her rug really did spell out Bruce Springsteen; imagine that a doctor really did say to a terminally ill patient, "you're ugly, too." Moore often employs protagonists who could be seen as stand-ins for the writer: dancers ("Dance in America"), librarians ("Community Life"), actors ("Willing"), word-obsessed employees of scholastic testing companies ("Which Is More Than I Can Say about Some People"). But in Zoë she has created a character whose knack for narrative almost matches her own.

Now, the world conjured by Zoë's similes and digressions is, to put it mildly, considerably different from the one in which most of us usually take ourselves to be living. Indeed, in her jokes, she is a full-blooded fabulist. At times the minifictions she creates involve total impossibilities, scenarios worthy of fairy tales: the Talking Lab, the house crying and throwing up. At other times her imagination deals not in impossibilities but in marvelous improbabilities: Heidi lugging goat milk up a hill in the Midwest, room freshener qua perfume, the mother shipping off porn to her daughter, symbols on an oriental rug advertising rock stars. The humor of all these situations arises from their being just beyond the pale of likelihood—likelihood, that is, within the context of a post-Galilean disenchanted physical universe and the social context of contemporary American life. They imagine a kind of alternative world, one in which the sorts of physical laws and social customs with which we are more or less familiar—the sorts of laws and customs upon which the intelligibil-

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ity of our everyday lives depends—are flouted. Were we to be plopped down into a world in which people really did tend to their houses the way they tend to their infants (wrapping them in diapers, trying to feed them baby food, caressing their walls and windows before putting them to bed at night) or in which dogs really could act as butlers (choosing the wine that Master likes with his meals, topping off his glass with the right mixture of humility and aplomb), we would be as befuddled as Alice after she falls through the looking glass. The point may seem self-evident, but it would be a mistake to overlook it. As Donald Davidson observes, we recognize metaphors partly by recognizing them as nonsensical. "Absurdity or contradiction in a metaphorical sentence," he writes, "guarantees that we won't believe it, and invites us, under proper circumstances, to take the sentence metaphorically" (258). Clearly this does not mean that all absurd sentences should be taken as metaphors or fictions. What counts as absurd in one time and place might be perfectly ordinary a few hundred years later or a few hundred miles away. But it does mean that the reader's perception of anomaly is, though not a sufficient condition, at least a necessary one for identifying metaphors. Likewise with Zoë's jokes. It would not be impossible for a mother to send her daughter pornography; indeed, it probably sometimes even happens. But if people laugh at the joke—and many people will—it is because it defies many of the properties we customarily associate with motherhood. Similarly, we would not laugh at the house-as-baby joke or the dog-as-butler joke if we saw these things as commonplace.

If there are a couple ways of reading the jokes in the story, then one is to see them as instances of alternative worlds—of "worldmaking," to use Nelson Goodman's influential phrase. From this point of view, the line between the made and the found, between fiction and fact, is undecidable, since all facts are shaped by human needs, purposes, and entrenched customs. Facts are, in short, constructed, and relative to the particular world under consideration. Accordingly, descriptions that, like Zoë's stories, do not denote things in the world described by science or ordinary citizens can still be true. Zoë's jokes are akin to the story of Don Quixote, which, as Goodman says, "applies to many of us" if seen in a certain light (103). "Invented" objects and "real" objects are all, from this point of view, products of the human mind, and stories about each of them are equally candidates for truth, albeit slightly different kinds. Thus Zoë is a Goodmanian irrealist whose worlds counteract the stale, routinized worlds of

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Earl, her students, and the people who predictably refer to the city lights as jewels and necklaces. Both kinds of worlds are made or constructed, but like the Bloomian strong poet, Zoë is to be admired for the power and inventiveness that she brings to hers. In this reading, she makes explicit the worldmaking capacities that constitute all human thought, and as a joketeller she becomes not merely a humorist but a self-creator.

A second way of reading the jokes of the story would emphasize the distinction between fact and fiction and insist that Zoë's jokes, like fictions generally, are nonassertoric. They do not, that is, make a new world because they do not make assertions about *any* world. And because they do not make claims about some state of affairs, no truth-value—no judgments of truth or falsity—can be assigned to them. The story of the butler dog is neither true nor false because Zoë is not asserting that the butler dog ever existed; the simile about the UPS-delivered pornography is merely a simile, since no one believes that such magazines were ever sent; and so forth. The things described in a fiction do not fit into the furniture of the universe. Moreover—so this argument might continue—claims about metaphorical truth do little to save the worldmaking theory as a whole from collapsing. What, after all, would count as being metaphorically *false?* The literal truth and falsity of a sentence can often be hard enough to sort out, let alone its metaphorical truth or falsity. Fictions, in short, are parasitic on assertions, and thus deserve a secondary status in our hierarchy of speech acts. Taking this second line of thought to its extreme, we would eventually have a position resembling that of the logical positivists, whose insistence that truth can be a property only of analytic (logical or mathematical) or synthetic (scientific) statements led them to a complete lack of interest in the decidedly nonverifiable statements characteristic of what we call fiction.[5] That jokes are fictions on a small scale means they are not the stuff from which the world—or true and false claims about it—is made, and thus deserve no special or privileged place in our working ontology. Jokes are playful, creative, inventive. But they are not in any sense true.

"You're Ugly, Too" is a remarkable story in part because of the ways in which it dramatizes the shortcomings of both of the theories of joking and fiction that I have just sketched. The shortcomings of the worldmaking arguments are manifest in the story in a couple of ways. For one thing, if Zoë makes a world through her joking, the things of her world do not exist in the way that tables, chairs, and other physical objects can be said

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to exist in our ordinary undertakings. Evidence for this comes when we consider that, in real life, a dog either does or does not have a collar around its neck, an Oriental rug either is or is not eight feet wide by ten feet long, and room freshener either is or is not lemon scented. In ordinary circumstances, that is, we can apply what logicians call the principle of bivalence to objects and actions. But this is not true of the dog, rug, or room freshener about which Zoë jokes. There is no answer to the question of what the butler dog has around its neck because the text simply does not say. The objects and events of Zoë's stories are placed within a frame in a way that objects and events in the real world are not.

And the presence of a frame around Zoë's stories is more than an arcane logical matter. In fact it initiates all of the moral and emotional dilemmas dramatized in the text as a whole. The story is nothing if not a tale of disappointment and frustration, continually registering the gulf between what is real and what Zoë imagines, and the persistent presence of such a gulf is the source of its underlying sadness. If Zoë's jokes were capable of creating alternative worlds in any substantial sense, if she really could construct alternative universes into which she could insert herself, she could live blissfully unaware of any word/world distinction. But of course much of the drama of story depends on the gap—to recall Yeats's terms invoked by Aldridge—between Zoë's efforts at "gaiety" and the "dread" of the world, and the powerful consequences this difference entails. Practically speaking, Zoë's fabulist jokes not only prevent her from existing in a series of proliferating worlds but isolate her from the one in which she actually lives.

If, however, Moore's text undermines the worldmaking argument about jokes, it also suggests why we might want to cast doubt on the positivistic theory of joking, the one that would dismiss Zoë's minifictions as a species of self-enclosed nonsense. The principle of bivalence may not apply to the objects and events described in a joke, and the sentences may not have truth-values attached to them, but jokes clearly can have pragmatic effects on people and the world. To recall a remark from Wittgenstein (whose work makes ample use of Zoë-like verbal absurdism), the confusion of syntax in an utterance such as "Milk me sugar" may make the expression less immediately transparent than the order "Bring me sugar," but this does not mean that the words have no impact whatsoever: a listener might stare and gape, even though the phrase is not a command to stare and gape (138). Or, to adapt a thought expressed by

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Davidson in a discussion of metaphors, the words of a joke might have no meanings apart from the ordinary dictionary definitions, but "like a picture or a bump on the head," they might make us "appreciate some fact" hitherto unrecognized (262). And indeed, Zoë's tale of the Talking Lab, to take one flagrant example of fiction making, has both short-term and medium-term pragmatic consequences. The wife frowns, and Murray Peterson never calls her for another date—all despite the fact that the anecdote contains neither an instruction to frown nor an instruction to stop calling. A similar set of real-world effects is generated by Zoë's interactions with her students. When she started teaching, she is said to have believed that her humor was "irony, something gently layered and sophisticated, something alien to the Midwest" (68). Yet the students come to see something aggressive in it and label it sarcasm, a term Zoë eventually comes to accept. They recognize that her jokes about room freshener and the worthlessness of studying history (to a student who says she wants her history degree "to mean something," Zoë curtly responds: "Well, there's your problem") are not self-enclosed entities. The jokes have, as we sometimes say, a "point."

The aggressive potential of jokes is one indication that Ted Cohen's link between joking and intimacy, which I noted earlier, should not be overgeneralized. Indeed, this potential is crucial to the ending of the story, which crystallizes the philosophical questions I've been describing here about both the pragmatics of sentences and the meaning of fictions generally. The final scene can be understood as an allegorical depiction of the problems I have just been locating in both the worldmaking and the positivistic theories. Disgruntled by the way his conversation with Zoë has gone, Earl gazes over the balcony to the Manhattan streets below. The hint of misogyny that has been running through his conversation so far begins to come into the open, as he suggests that contemporary men have been neutered in precisely the same way as certain bugs that are sprayed with female bug hormones: "The male bugs get so crazy in the presence of this hormone, they're screwing everything in sight: trees, rocks—everything but female bugs." Zoë responds in a startling way:

> Zoë came up, slow, from behind and gave him a shove. His arms slipped forward, off the railing, out over the city below. Beer spilled out of his bottle, raining twenty stories down to the street.
>
> "Hey, what are you doing?!" he said, whipping around. He

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> stood straight and readied and moved away from the railing, sidestepping Zoë. "What the *hell* are you doing?"
>
> "Just kidding," she said. "I was just kidding." But he gazed at her, appalled and frightened, his Magic Marker buttocks turned away now toward all of downtown, . . . *"Really, I was just kidding!"* Zoë shouted. The wind lifted the hair up off her head, skyward in the spines behind the bone. If there were a lake, the moonlight would dance across it in conniptions. She smiled at him, and wondered how she looked. (91)

The shove that Zoë gives Earl is the final joke in the text and the culmination of all the joking that has occurred throughout the story. She does not, of course, push Earl over the balcony, but her action expresses a live possibility. We might read the gesture, then, as enacting the kind of fiction telling that she has been engaged in for the entire story—a physical form, as she says here, of "kidding." She intends to push Earl over the balcony no more than she intends to believe the story of the Talking Lab or Heidi lugging milk up the hill. But the subjunctive quality of the act is not what Earl perceives. It is not a mere joke to him. He interprets the shove not as a moment of play, something to be bracketed off from more "serious" actions, but as a deliberate effort to throw him over the balcony. He fails to perceive the fictional nature of the act and, unsurprisingly, is outraged by what he sees as Zoë's attempt to murder him.

I refer to this moment as an allegory because it dramatizes, in a wonderfully vivid way, two different kinds of audiences for jokes and, in turn, two different kinds of readers of fiction. Earl, we might say, implicitly believes the worldmaking arguments. What *seems* to be *is*. Failing to understand that a joke—"kidding"—is not an assertion about some state of affairs, he is akin to the person who would treat Zoë's anecdote about the Talking Lab as a report about the latest wonder discovered in the animal kingdom. Or analogously, he might be said to resemble the person who is too easily offended by an off-color joke.[6] An emblem of the hopelessly earnest person who can only be offended by absurdity or ignorant of it, he shows no sign, despite his Halloween costume, of campishly pretending to be a woman, and he tries desperately to engage Zoë—a total stranger—by repeatedly asking what she "really" thinks "about love" (89). Like the partygoers who tritely compare the city lights to necklaces and jewels, he is capable of only the bluntest and most unimaginative of fic-

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tions, as we see in his metaphor about the hormone-sprayed bugs or his revision of Zoë's favorite joke, in which the doctor gives not a "second opinion" but announces his sexual conquest of the office secretary. Yet for all of Earl's shortcomings, Zoë is no less at fault in their conversation. She is the sort of reader who fails to understand that although jokes do not "say" anything, they nevertheless have real effects on the world. If Earl is the emblem of the reader who mistakes words for the world, then Zoë is the emblem of the reader who fails to understand the kind of force that words can have. She avoids responsibility for her own words and thus trivializes her own humor, believing that her kidding will be regarded as well contained, nothing to get upset over. She is the dangerously ironic person who takes jokes to be "mere" speech, not realizing that speech can, when used in certain ways in certain circumstances, be genuinely powerful.

That the final scene dramatizes a failure on the part of Zoë becomes evident when we note something important about the story as a whole—namely, its third-person point of view. Earlier I noted the use of the second person in the opening paragraph and the intimacy that it attempts to foster between the reader and Zoë. But after its opening paragraph, the text becomes a resolutely third-person tale. This is not to say that the voice of the text is that of a distant, neutral observer. "You're Ugly, Too" is told from a perspective close to that of Zoë herself, and makes heavy use of free indirect discourse. Yet the perspective is not coextensive with Zoë's, and the use of a bifurcated narrative voice subtly introduces another perspective into the text, one importantly different from that of Zoë herself. The text uses Zoë's mind and vocabulary as a filter through which the narrative's sentences almost always pass, but the third-person voice of the story also grants us a certain degree of distance from her perspective. It gives us a buffer from Zoë's consistently ironic (or should we say sarcastic) similes and anecdotes.

And a buffer—both a logical and a moral buffer—from Zoë's similes and anecdotes is, I think, precisely what the story wants us to have at the end. It is here that the alternative perspective provided by the narrator's voice has its greatest impact. At the story's climax, in the final joke of a joke-filled story, the third-person narration lifts us out of Zoë's mind and words and places us in an intersubjective domain. The final sentence of the story—"She smiled at him, and wondered how she looked"—reports Zoë's thoughts, but these thoughts are directed to an outside world not

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of her own making. And this outside world, the world from which the third-person narrator implicitly speaks, is one that resembles not the Wonderland domains that Zoë often creates in her jokes but rather the one explored and charted by realist fiction. It is a world in which dogs do not act as butlers; in which people can, if shoved hard enough, fall over balconies to their death; and in which a story or a joke can have real effects. Zoë's jokes are fantastical, but within the text as a whole, they are placed within—set off by—a fundamentally realistic framework.

About the critical response to her work, Moore has observed that "there is that prejudice against humor as somehow mucking up the seriousness of your endeavor" ("Moore's Better Blues"). If such a "prejudice" in fact exists against Moore's fiction, one would need an examination of more of her work to dispel it completely here. But "You're Ugly, Too" is neither a minor nor an unrepresentative piece of Moore's oeuvre, and the direction of thought that I've sketched here is enough to give a sense of the "seriousness" of her particular type of "endeavor." As I've been describing it, the story resembles a film in which, after a series of bizarre and inexplicable events, a character wakes up and realizes that he or she has been dreaming all along. The power of both Moore's satire and her realism, to return to Aldridge's description of her work as "satirical realism," arises from her effort to move between dream and reality, to distinguish fantastical from naturalistic modes of fiction. It is in this sense that her work foregrounds not the self-enclosed work of art but the contexts from which such works emerge. By contrast, the gothic fabulism of a writer such as Boyle, Aldridge's opposing example, arises from an ontologically unmixed mode of storytelling. Boyle's stories do not break the dream frame to ask how likely it is that a husband would be cuckolded by the chimpanzee from the laboratory where his wife is a researcher, as in "Descent of Man" (3–16). The characters of his stories no more "wake up" than Barthelme's characters "wake up" from a world in which the architecture consists only of churches ("City of Churches," 209–13) or the "king of jazz" is someone named Hokie Mokie ("King of Jazz," 354–58).[7] In Moore's comedy, Mitty-like flights of fancy are wryly held in check by a respect for the norms of realist fiction. "You're Ugly, Too" asks whether the pain of decay and death can be overcome by jokes and whether the failures of contemporary life can be ignored by telling alternative stories about it.

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Notes

1. The use of the second person is a prominent feature of *Self-Help,* Moore's first book. Here, however, I am bracketing off any consideration of that text.

2. Most notoriously by John Barth, who remarked that Carver's popularity was evidence of the declining literacy rates of the reading public. However, Carver's work retains a degree of anguish and reticence that many people may not typically associate with television.

3. Tanner's statement is insightful, but it would be a mistake not to note exceptions. Indeed, Tanner's own example is a good case in point: Pynchon's texts are not themselves without their moments of tenderness, most notably in the friendship that develops between the title characters of *Mason & Dixon.*

4. In case the joke is less well-known than I assume: A man visits his doctor, and the doctor says, "Well, I'm sorry to say, you've only got six weeks to live." "I want a second opinion," says the guy. "You want a second opinion? Okay," says the doctor, "You're ugly, too."

5. See, most famously, Ayer.

6. See Cohen, chapter 6, for some reflection on the delicate question of taste and judgment in dealing with the effects of jokes.

7. I do not mean to imply that the fabulism of Boyle and Barthelme is incapable of depicting the tension between dream and reality that I've been describing here. Indeed, a recurring figure in the work of these two writers is the reader surrogate who remains perpetually confounded by the absurdist worlds into which he or she is cast, as we see, for example, with the narrator of "Descent of Man" or Cecelia of "City of Churches." It is notable, however, that the characters in both these stories are depicted as trapped by the world around them, whereas Zoë is depicted—more negatively, in my reading—as trapped in her own mind.

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"Bitched": Feminization, Identity, and the Hemingwayesque in *The Sun Also Rises*

Todd Onderdonk

In a letter to F. Scott Fitzgerald after the publication of *Tender Is the Night* in 1934, Ernest Hemingway urged his friend to take a more objective approach to his writing:

> Forget your personal tragedy. We are all bitched from the start and you especially have to be hurt like hell before you can write seriously. But when you get the damned hurt use it—don't cheat with it. Be as faithful to it as a scientist. (*Letters* 408)

Though Hemingway implies, a paragraph later, that his friend is literally "bitched" in having married Zelda Sayre, "someone who was jealous of your work, wants to compete with you and ruins you," to be "bitched" here signifies more broadly that one is, in some cultural or existential way, dogged, wounded, even castrated "from the start." This could be a more general human problem, but the term *bitched* seems to narrow the field by half in implying that the condition it names is—that bad thing—to be feminized.

While *feminization* is not a word Hemingway himself uses, the metaphorical representation of men acting or being treated "like a woman"—that is, adopting or being forced into states of shameful passivity or disempowerment—is a central concern of many of his works. Consider the narrator's father in "The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife," impotently loading and unloading his shotgun after a humiliating encounter with a local Indian man, and then apologizing to his wife for slamming the

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door; or the shell-shocked protagonist of "Big Two-Hearted River," his "terrible panic," in Malcolm Cowley's words, "just barely under control" as he declines the "tragic adventure" of fishing in the swamp where the truly big trout are (qtd. in Kenner 150); or Frederic Henry of *A Farewell to Arms,* fleeing, not participating in the war on the Italian front, and powerless before the events that rob him of his wife and child; or *To Have and Have Not*'s virile but doomed Henry Morgan, who, as his self-reliance fails him in Depression-ravaged Key West, laments "One man alone . . . ain't got no bloody fucking chance" (225). Even if Hemingway, in his advice to Fitzgerald, meant only to name suffering and impotence as the human condition, the word *bitched* evokes modernist despair in just the gendered way that many male-produced modernisms do: as a loss of an ostensibly masculine autonomy and certainty to what is seen as a feminizing modernity. Far from denying this humiliating circumstance, however, Hemingway seems to embrace it as the very condition of "serious" literary artistry—a surprising move for an author who is still deemed the twentieth century's preeminent "man's man."

I will argue here for the centrality of the issue of feminization to understanding Hemingway's first novel *The Sun Also Rises.* With its seeming focus on "bulls, balls, and booze," that work might be said to have initiated the cult of cojones that is Hemingway's popular legacy (Crowley 43), but close inspection of this text reveals a proliferation of male humiliations and tender masculine intimacies, repeated transgressions of this cojonic image. Narrator Jake Barnes is impotent due to a war wound, and he faces intense humiliations at the hands of the sexually peripatetic "new woman," Lady Brett Ashley. He even takes a beating over her at the hands of the novel's much-deprecated Robert Cohn. At the same time, like Nick Adams, Frederic Henry, or Robert Jordan of *For Whom the Bell Tolls,* Jake—named Hem in drafts until the final stages of the novel's composition—is a patently Hemingwayesque figure: like his creator, he served in the war and is a journalist, outdoorsman, tennis amateur, and bullfighting aficionado. How do we square, then, this sensitive, socially passive observer, given to tears and quiet resignation, with the public and private legend of machismo that was already developing around Hemingway at this time?[1]

To understand these contradictions we should start with the notion of male authorship that Hemingway exhorts Fitzgerald to adopt, which demands a male subject who must first be wounded in order to "write

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seriously." Seriousness, indeed, was a matter of deep concern to male modernist authors for whom the "literary" evoked a cluster of stigmatizing associations with femininity, including the ostensibly female-penned popular novel and its largely female readership, the sexual "decadence" of Wildean aestheticism, and the perceived domestication and gentility of the literary establishment at the turn of the century.[2] Moreover, Hemingway and his generation grew up admiring the frontier ideals of "rough rider" and imperialist Theodore Roosevelt, who, in advocating a doctrine of "the strenuous life, the life of effort, of labor and strife" in a speech in 1899, promoted a widely influential template for proper American manhood. "We do not admire the man of timid peace," Roosevelt asserted. "We admire the man who embodies victorious effort; the man who never wrongs his neighbor, who is prompt to help a friend, but who has those virile qualities necessary to win in the stern strife of actual life." Roosevelt's "victories," however, come at a steep price in labor and male suffering: the "strife" of "danger . . . hardship [and] bitter toil." Thus a profession in which men do not toil and suffer is unmanly, and the man of letters might appear to live what Roosevelt would describe as "a life of slothful ease."

Two years before Roosevelt's speech, another Hemingway hero, Joseph Conrad, employed similar language of "labor and strife" in what Michael North calls "the preface to modernism" (37), the preface to Conrad's 1897 novel *The Nigger of the Narcissus.* But here the work is artistic and the struggle internal. Conrad's preface can be read as a call for literary professionalization, a "bringing to light the truth," but truth of a different and perhaps more fundamental kind than that of "the thinker or the scientist," those esteemed seekers "whose words are heard with reverence" (Conrad 11). Seeking to demarcate a domain of expertise unique to the artist, Conrad would have art plumb the suffering self, "that lonely region of stress and strife," to find the hard, empirical truths with which the artist might vie with the thinker or scientist for masculine social authority and professional prestige.[3] As it is for the Rooseveltian laborer, this work is consummately difficult and painful: "The sincere endeavor to accomplish that creative task, to go as far on that road as his strength will carry him, to go undeterred by faltering, weariness or reproach, is the only justification for the worker in prose" (Conrad 12). The sufferings that an artist might endure are part of this justification that modernists amplified in their quest for legitimation, for a cultural affirmation simultaneously professional and masculine.

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Professionalization and gender were also at issue in the high modernist concept of impersonality advocated by Eliot, Pound, and Stein. These thinkers made a virtue of the separation, in Eliot's words in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," between "the man who suffers and the mind which creates" (*Sacred Wood* 54), a separation that adherents to this doctrine would use to differentiate between the real and the inauthentic artist and thus between the intellectually successful artist and the failure. Stein's definition of the masterpiece, deployed in a lecture devoted to distinguishing the authentic masterpiece from the inauthentic, also illustrates this mode of thought. For her, an authentic masterpiece is predicated on the artist's ability to perform a kind of mental dissociation from the experiencing self:

> And so always it is true that the master-piece has nothing to do with human nature or with identity, it has to do with the human mind and the entity that is with a thing in itself and not in relation. The moment it is in relation it is common knowledge and anybody can feel and know it and it is not a masterpiece. (498)

This passage suggests that for Stein, true art has less to do with self-expression than a kind of objective reportage achieved by mentally transcending the self. This achievement, moreover, separates the authentic, professional artist from the idler or dilettante, who lacks the discipline to escape the pitfalls of "relation," of the merely personal. This separation was all the more important for men to the degree that the divide between highbrow and mass cultural representations was colored by evaluative judgments about gender, as Andreas Huyssen has famously argued in linking mass culture to woman as "modernism's Other" (44). This is not to claim that men were victims of these forces, or that they suffered more than women from authorial anxieties or gender-based cultural pressures, but simply to observe differences in the ways normative notions of gender affected male and female authors of the period. Such historical specificities are crucial when we try to reckon the force of anxieties about masculinity as a shaping force of male modernist works.

Of course, male authorship was a vexed, crisis-ridden affair for decades before Hemingway's time, and as critics like David Leverenz, Scott Derrick, and Michael Davitt Bell have argued, authors' anxieties about masculinity were crucial to the aesthetic goals of literary romancers, realists, and naturalists.[4] But the specter of male disempowerment that

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is quenched with the censure of Hester at the end of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter,* for example, or with the suicide of Zenobia in *The Blithedale Romance,* or with the marriage of suffragette Verena Tarrant to the patriarchal Basil Ransom in Henry James's *The Bostonians*—that specter, I would argue, emerges in some modernist representations as a virtual fait accompli, a new condition of modern life. As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar describe it, the American "battle of the sexes" was a conflict that by "the height of the modernist era . . . both sexes by and large agreed that women were winning" (4). Fitzgerald's *Tender Is the Night,* for example, is the story of one man's long decline into feminization and social impotence. In marrying his rich patient, Nicole Warren, the psychiatrist Dick Diver trades intellectual mastery and manly autonomy for a role of inglorious service to powerful heiresses; and when his usefulness wanes, he is discarded by his female masters. Nathanael West provides a particularly hopeless example of modern male feminization in his powerless male protagonist Miss Lonelyhearts. While his drunken literary friends impotently fantasize about the rape of women authors, Miss Lonelyhearts works as a newspaper advice columnist, a job that exposes him to the tormented lives of real people for whom he can do nothing.

But T. S. Eliot's "The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock," questioning the possibility of male authorship itself in such a female-dominated world, might stand as the archetypal literary portrayal of modern male feminization, taking the author's own woundedness, including his humiliations, as the proper subject matter of the modern author. The narrator lives in a world of idleness and feminine domesticity, of "braceleted white arms," "teacups," and (presumably genteel) "novels" (5, 6); he imagines himself more Polonius than Hamlet in this womanly realm, an "easy tool" impaled by casual "eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase" (4). In this penetrated, feminized position, he asks: "And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin, / When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall / Then how should I begin / To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?" Yet Prufrock's bewitchment is the occasion for the poem itself, a poem in which he unsparingly, impersonally depicts his own woundedness and loss of agency. His loss of agency becomes, that is, the occasion for him to regain agency, a literary agency he achieves as the ostensible author of his love song.

In light of this paradigmatic modernist emphasis on a (redemptive) discipline of "scientific" impersonality in the face of male defeats and humiliations, it is perhaps less shocking to find Hemingway—who was,

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after all, aesthetic acolyte to both Stein and Pound in Paris before writing *The Sun Also Rises,* and who wrote reverentially of spotting "Mr. Joyce" in cafes there—depicting the enabling and ennobling possibilities of male feminization, at least for himself. That is, though Hemingway embraced many aspects of high modernist aesthetics, his biographies document a man who had little interest in being one of many. In the boxing metaphors he often used to discuss writing, Hemingway imagined fighting authors like James, Turgenev, Maupassant, Stendhal, and Tolstoy for a kind of literary championship of the world; he thus needed to separate his own form of authorial vision from that of other artists and writers (though he freely admitted that, of dead writers, "Mr. Shakespeare" was "The Champion" [*Letters* 673]).[5] Thus for Hemingway, feminization can enable only the special artist, the *Hemingwayesque* artist, who alone is able to wrest truth and literary meaning from his humiliation. To this end, Hemingway employs in his first novel a technique of authorial self-construction to imply his own exclusive possession of just this faculty.

We can read Jake as what Sally Robinson in *Marked Men* terms an "author surrogate," a character "who play[s] out, with varying degrees of literalness, the wounding of white male authority" (88). The author surrogate, that is, metonymically evokes the material author as victim of wrongs done to masculine superiority—as part of a bid rhetorically to restore it. In this way, Jake evokes his creator in the paradoxical posture of victimhood and superiority. Thus, though Jake lingers long in the discursive position of hapless victim, his feminization ultimately elevates him as one of the novel's only true men. This is possible in the sense that, both epistemologically and morally, Jake masters his own feminization, not only in the forthright report he provides of its devastations, but as we will see, in the resigned dignity with which—despite exquisite vulnerabilities—he endures it. If, as I will argue, the novel frames feminization as a universal condition for men, it also suggests that the shame of that condition is not to know it, shifting the basis for evaluating manhood and authorship to matters of epistemology and comportment—making how one reacts to feminization the central issue. For example, when Brett sexually rejects Robert Cohn after a brief tryst in San Sebastian, for weeks afterward Cohn is in denial about his loss of agency in the relationship; Jake, in contrast, remains accutely aware of the historical reversal represented by Brett's sexual agency, though it pains him terribly; and for the most part he displays a fatalistic dignity toward it as opposed to Cohn's romantic delusions and ignoble violence.

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If we take such operations of Hemingwayesque self-construction seriously, they serve as normative constructs, operations that instruct men to be more like Jake than Cohn. They are thus vehicles by which Hemingway asseverates his own identity as the very template for masculine identity itself—a self-constructive practice, I would add, that shapes all his subsequent novels. In transforming a vanquished masculine identity into authorial mastery, Hemingway performs through the feminized Jake a novel-length recuperation of masculine authority exclusive to himself, even as he depicts the shattering of that authority for men in general. It is in this sense of performance that Jake accomplishes, by the end of the novel, what I would call the central aim of *The Sun Also Rises:* to set Hemingway symbolically above his literary competitors, to dramatize his exclusive apprehension of difficult truths, and to suggest a form of professional identity in which authorship and manliness are not mutually exclusive. The novel's formal structure, which depicts Jake's relationship with Brett as a kind of engine of modern knowledge, is central to this aim. By the end, we have witnessed, in Jake's developing understanding of his sufferings, the formation of a masculine authorial consciousness sophisticated enough to conceive the novel we have just read, a novel articulating male humiliation and disempowerment as the condition of authorship in the modern world.

Disciplining identity

But the very self-referentiality of what I am here calling the Hemingwayesque, a set of traits subtly exalted in the novel, raises a difficult question. For if what or who Hemingway advocates for in his novels is not some group to which he belongs—men, say, or white men, or even white male authors—but his own anxious, aspiring, biographical self, how do we reconcile this author's manifest anxieties about gender with the many other normative emphases signified by the Hemingwayesque, whether we read for race or class, or even for the subtly prescriptive stands his work takes on ethics, politics, aesthetics, or morality? A Hemingwayesque protagonist necessarily comprehends many forms of identity besides his biological maleness and attendant social masculinity: he is also typically white, American, and of the better-off, better-educated class; he desires certain objects and follows demanding codes of behavior; he respects certain books and scorns others; he has distinct sensitivities and affective

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capacities; and he has certain (if sometimes shifting) political and philosophical affinities. Isolating any one of these traits, it is not difficult to find, for example, a casually virulent white supremacism in Hemingway's work, as Toni Morrison finds in *To Have and Have Not;* or a nativist impulse, as Walter Benn Michaels finds in *The Sun Also Rises;* or any number of other agendas—of class, ethnicity, sexuality, religion—for which Hemingway's works might provide strong textual support. Yet as some critics have begun to point out, it may be insufficient to analyze such agendas independently from the whole complex of social, professional, civic, and familial identities that we all so transiently inhabit, even in the course of a single hour or day.

The observation that gendered difference has been overvalued in relation to other, interrelated forms of identity is a foundational tenet of the burgeoning field of whiteness studies. For whiteness scholars, to blandly discuss what men do, or what defines masculinity, as if it were a singular, monolithic category, is not only to ignore such specificities as race, class, and ethnicity, which differently inflect how masculinity is lived by real, embodied men, but it also ignores the specificity of the category of white masculinity itself. Left unspecified, white masculinity has tended to function as a sort of normative, originary master brand against which all other differences are measured. To mark white masculinity is to acknowledge it as one condition among many, and not the preferred or original category from which all other forms of identity differ. Taking this argument one step further, Thomas DiPiero's recent *White Men Aren't* questions whether gender is necessarily important as an analytical category at all:

> It certainly seems true, as Freud claimed, that fundamental antagonisms pertaining to the way we live our bodies inform the organization of our psyches at the most basic level. But what I am contesting is the contention that such a psychic organization needs to take place strictly or even largely along gender lines. (46)

DiPiero's exemplar of this overvaluation is, naturally enough, Freud himself, whose selection of the difference between males and females as the primary "antagonism" of psychological development functioned to repress, even in Freud's own case studies, the influence of other social registers of difference. The result is to read gender improperly into—and over—those other differences.

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DiPiero's notion of identity as multiple, contingent, and even situational may suggest that the heavy emphasis feminist critics place on the binary of sexual difference is merely arbitrary, a repetition of Freud's—and culture's—mistake. Yet gender may not be so easily "disarticulated" from other determinants of identity, especially in the case of masculinity. Indeed, it might be more productive to consider this less as a mistake than as a clue, a way to observe how sexual difference works with other forms of difference in the establishment and maintenance of social identities. It may be that the heavy critical emphasis on this point reflects how gender sometimes functions, by itself subsuming and appropriating other forms of identity to its own imperatives. This is not to make out of gender what Frederic Jameson calls an "untranscendable horizon" (10), recentering it as the only framework that matters, but rather to inquire into the complex ways gendered difference interacts—often forcefully—with other forms of difference. DiPiero's gender seems at times almost a secondary effect, not only "inflected *by*" other forms of identity but "largely comprised *of* these things" (50; DiPiero's italics).

This last formulation is telling. If what we understand as gender is an accumulation of effects in other registers of difference, then it might be that we are not overvaluing gender's influence but undervaluing it. In theorizing sexual difference as subject to "inflection," DiPiero overlooks the perhaps more primary ways that gender, and masculinity in particular, inflects and may even drive other articulations of difference, especially in periods of historical stress and change. If modes of identity, of difference, are inseparable from each other, in particular historical and biographical contexts some forms of identity can take precedence over others and may even drive or coopt them. We might describe this process as a disciplining or channeling of identity. It is not difficult to imagine, however, many social contexts in which race, class, or sexuality would eclipse or outweigh concerns about gender. And it would be foolhardy to claim, without social and historical context, that we can know how any of these factors always or perhaps even generally works. But in *The Sun Also Rises,* it is gendered difference that Hemingway constructs as the encompassing factor. The novel offers a veritable buffet of hierarchized identities—not only the novel's harshly devalued women, "niggers," "faggots," and Jews, but also aristocrats, romantics, alcoholics—and crucially, a few aspirants to literary fame, notably Robert Cohn and his fiancée Frances. Yet as I will show, Hemingway's handling and ranking of these differences does more

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than attest to one man's or even one group's misogyny, anti-Semitism, or homophobia; rather, these attitudes are focused and articulated through an overriding concern with one particular form of manhood.

At the heart of my argument is the observation that in *The Sun Also Rises* sexual difference is the driving force behind the novel's other iterations of difference. Class, religion, race, ethnicity, nationality, aesthetics, epistemology—these differences are used instrumentally to establish the superiority of one version of gender, modern authorial masculinity, which Hemingway performs through Jake Barnes. Moreover, the difference between men and women is also invoked, improbably as it might seem, to differentiate between males. This may seem strange because, at least biologically, sexual difference would seem to be eliminated when all concerned parties are, normatively speaking, "properly" equipped with penises. Yet in Hemingway's depiction of male homosocial relations, hierarchical differences between men are gendered to accord with a division between males and inauthentic males, where to be *"less* male" in any sense is to be "like a woman." This "to have and have not" standard of masculinity requires Hemingway to redefine manhood in some startling ways, especially in light of his public image of cultivated machismo. This essay will thus examine Hemingway's deployment of the trope of male feminization and his performance (through Jake) of exemplary mental and moral masculinities as part of his influential construction of culturally authoritative modern authorship. But because of the very multiplicity and interdependence of different elements in identity itself, I begin by interrogating how one form of identity—in Hemingway's case, gender—can become a sort of master difference, one that uses other forms of identity as criteria for authentic manhood.

Marshalling identities

If there is widespread agreement that masculine identity is a central concern in Hemingway's work, there is anything but consensus about how it functions there. For many reasons, not least his aggressively manly public posture, Hemingway's representations of masculinity have divided scholars interested in how gender and sexuality figure in his work. For some, like Frederick Crews and Kenneth Lynn, Hemingway is the anxious patriarch, paragon of a kind of masculinity so unstable as to require constant, painful proofs; for others, like Nancy Comley and Robert Scholes, or

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more recently, Thomas Strychacz, he is the modernist hero reclaimed, a tough-minded explorer even of the ambiguities of gender and sexuality seemingly foreclosed by his famous obsession with manhood.[6] Taken together, however, these approaches suggest a kind of stalemate that has not advanced our understanding of this surprisingly complex figure.

An explanatory framework that would account for both the demystified and the heroized Hemingway would require acknowledging his fundamental *strangeness.* Indeed, perhaps no major American writer has exhibited a more contradictory combination of machismo and hypersensitivity, of heteronormative and homoerotic impulses, of laconicism and expressiveness. Recent scholarship has given us an admittedly more complex Hemingway, "interested" in homoeroticism and sexual role exchange, and even gender performativity. But this figure has tended to be advanced as a sexual progressive, his "androgyny" suggesting, as Crews puts it, "that Hemingway entertained broader sympathies than his manly code implied" (91). But must our Hemingway be filleted into such a divided figure? Might not both impulses, that of Hemingway's "manly code" and of his transgressive "sympathies," spring from the same root?

I argue that a complex attitude toward male feminization is at the heart of both Hemingway's sexual orthodoxy and his transgressions, since in his view the proper modern author, culturally and professionally pressured to demonstrate manly authority, must yet abandon many traditional markers of that authority precisely due to perceived changes in the conditions of modernity. Hemingwayesque identity is key to this paradox in the way it articulates not, as we would expect, traditionally physical or socially dominant forms of masculinity—forms of masculinity that Hemingway represents as no longer adequate to a feminizing modernity—but moral and intellectual faculties that allow the author, as opposed to the common man, subtly to overcome his disempowerment by acknowledging it in his art, "scientifically" turning "damned hurts" into new forms of modern knowledge. For Hemingway to assert masculine authority, that is, he must disavow dominance—especially physical and sexual dominance—in favor of traits he suggests are more epistemologically adequate to modern conditions. He does this by relentlessly, prejudicially contrasting Jake with the novel's racial, sexual, and literary others in a kind of foil system that works to establish the superior epistemological profile of the Hemingwayesque author.[7]

To see this system in action we begin with the novel's preeminent

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foil, Robert Cohn, whose main function arguably is to embody or enact difference itself. I have proposed that Hemingway makes sexual difference into a kind of master difference in the novel, one that uses other forms of difference as criteria for manhood. Robert Cohn illustrates this phenomenon in the way that each of his distinguishing characteristics—his literary aspirations, his Jewishness, even his niceness—are framed as sexual differences, differences from the normative Jake. A novelist who despite his mediocrities enacts a sort of dominance over Jake by beating him up and sleeping with Brett, Cohn nonetheless functions to establish the feminized Jake's claim to authorial masculinity. If the baseline of modern masculinity is, as I will show Hemingway suggesting, a state of feminization, then other differences must be mobilized to distinguish between men. Eschewing weaker arguments that could be made about degrees of feminization, Hemingway chooses the route of difference—or, as with Cohn, multiple differences—to define his category of authentic authorial manhood. Thus Cohn's Jewishness, niceness, and impercipience are all *gendered* traits in Hemingway's representation, traits that suggest Cohn's lack of the very epistemological masculinity that distinguishes Jake among the characters in the novel. Cohn belongs, in other words, to another sexual category entirely, despite his physical advantages over Jake as a real (not would-be) lover to Brett and a trained boxer—traits we might expect to find celebrated by Hemingway based on his own later womanizing and his amateur passion for boxing. If, in his letters and public life, Hemingway emphasized these traits as markers of manhood, in his art, manhood is signified primarily as epistemological superiority.

While Jake's feminization emerges in the revelation of Cohn's tryst with Brett, Jake preempts this humiliation in the novel's opening by implying his own artistic and epistemological advantages over Cohn. He demonstrates the same literary faculties of objective observation, analysis, and transcription that Hemingway will later advocate to Fitzgerald. This appeal to authorial objectivity, even toward one's own suffering, finds its fulfillment in Jake's empiricism and literary antiromanticism, rigorous "mental masculinities" that are contrasted with Cohn's softheaded literary approach. Thus, though Jake works in Paris as a reporter, he is also a literary man, allowing Hemingway to perform his own literary-critical bona fides through his Hemingwayesque surrogate.

For example, Jake exhibits a tough-minded literary sophistication in mocking a book that Cohn admires. He sees W. H. Hudson's *The Purple*

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Land as a "very sinister book if encountered late in life. It recounts splendid imaginary amorous adventures of a perfect English gentleman in an intensely romantic land, the scenery of which is very well described" (9). This critique punctures Cohn's genteel anglophilia and moony romanticism, forms of epistemological distortion characterizing the dilettante and the aesthete, those effeminate bogies of high modernism. Jake allows that Cohn's own book had been "not really such a bad novel as the critics later called it," but adds "although it was a very poor novel" (5–6). In passing such judgments, Jake demonstrates his freedom from the kind of gendered weakness that Cohn's sentimentality and lack of critical rigor signify. Enamored with a middlebrow novel that Jake views as if from above, Cohn cannot see the modern world without delusion—precisely what his critique of Cohn indicates Jake can do.

To borrow some terms of rhetoric, Hemingway is not interested in making an evaluative claim about Cohn, an intracategory distinction, but wants instead to make a definitional claim, one that makes distinctions between categories. He evokes the terms of sexual difference to distinguish between persons of the same sex, and thus his identity category of the inauthentic (that is, the non-Hemingwayesque) man approximates the category of woman. Indeed, as we will see, the romaticism that excludes Cohn from the category of epistemological manhood returns at the end of the novel to discredit Brett Ashley. What seems to drive Hemingway in creating this category of male inauthenticity is a fear of taxonomical confusion: how does one tell the real man from the counterfeit? Indeed, so concerned is Hemingway with the taxonomic instability between man and not-man that almost every difference is retooled and mobilized as an adjunct of sexual difference—that is, a difference that mimes or replicates between men the hierarchical division between men and women. Thus do we find Hemingway making much of differences both large and small, manipulating them to support that one crucial, engrossing difference—between the real man and the imitation.

Consider, for example, Cohn's accentuated Jewishness, which I would argue functions here less as a denigrated racial category than as evidence of gender inauthenticity—and thus as a counter of Jake's authenticity. To suggest that Cohn does not belong in the category of proper manhood, Jake narrates his friend's life as a series of lame approximations; Cohn the Jew, the alien, can only imitate the behavior of a "real" American man. He learns boxing only "painfully," suggesting that he does not acquire

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this skill with the ease of a "natural" or authentic man (4). In the world of literature Cohn is equally "unnatural." His money buys him influence with a literary review, but his engagement is not with the aesthetic or intellectual questions of belles lettres but with the crude "authority of editing" (5). Indeed, Cohn is almost comical as an aspirant to Hemingway's new norms of masculinity, falling ridiculously, romantically in love with the sexually itinerant Brett and missing every cue of proper male behavior as a member of the "herd" of men surrounding her. But these cues, as well as these judgments, are given us by Jake, so that what we might otherwise be tempted to interpret as signs of Cohn's civility and humanity—his distaste for boxing, his disgust for the barbarity of the bullfight—become instead signs of his categorical exclusion.

Moral masculinities

If Hemingway's mobilization of racial and other differences in constructing a newer, truer masculine identity suggests a kind of authorial desperation, Jake himself practices only a quiet, ironic dignity. Indeed, dignity in the face of feminization is crucial to the novel's ideological project. Though Hemingway's representation of the "lost generation" suggests a modern world in which everyone is dominated by something, this universal or existential "castration" has poignancy for only a few men. Such men—Pedro Romero and the arrow-scarred Count Mippipopolous, for instance—display a "right" notion of male social comportment, a kind of resigned "moral masculinity" that takes feminization as a strangely enabling condition. Though these men too fall short of Hemingwayesque authorship, Romero lacking the modern sophistication of that status, the Count its vocational dedication to seriousness, they are nevertheless portrayed with a level of pathos that is denied to other characters. They thus reinforce Jake's norm-setting function, which is predicated not only on epistemological mastery but on his fine sense of emotional restraint.

Not coincidentally, Hemingway's prose style is famous for this very quality, but with the result that his prose has been tautologically gendered masculine by many critics. Even if crafting a distinctively "male" prose style was Hemingway's intent, his construction need not be ours. When Hemingway's prose is admiringly described as terse, tough, hard, hard-boiled, muscular, or lean, deriving its power from short declarative sentences, we accept too readily the premise that expressiveness is a

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womanish thing, and the best a male writer can do—short of bemused silence—is to whittle back his words to avoid crossing into some prolix feminine. But I would even contest the descriptive accuracy of such adjectives in reference to Hemingway's work. Though his style does achieve an effect of simplicity, many of his sentences are ambitiously, artily long and complex, even sprawling. Moreover, while he does treat some matters in an ostentatiously hard-boiled way, the scope of Hemingway's subjects include psychological, sexual, and emotional revelations—the topics of fear and sexual role exchange, for example, appear in almost all of his novels—that might seem better avoided by aspirants to masculine iconicity. What has been whittled back in Hemingway's style is a certain order of psychological explanation, and this is what his famous iceberg analogy describes, although it evokes both a conventionally gendered and a gender-transgressive modernist literary practice.

Hemingway describes his art of omission in *Death in the Afternoon:* "The dignity of an iceberg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water" (192). "Dignity" seems strange as an attribute of an iceberg, suggesting that Hemingway is less concerned with writing about external realities than inner ones—especially those unruly things, emotions. His reserve in psychological description would thus seem to be attuned with such masculinizing modernist prescriptions as imagist Richard Aldington's "No slop, no sentimentality" (qtd. in Kaufman 60) or Pound's antiromantic proscription of ornamentation and excess adjectives. This ethic of restraint is given voice (if not clearly endorsed) in various places in Hemingway's work, as in "The Short Happy Life of Frances Macomber," where Robert Wilson counsels: "Doesn't do to talk too much about all this. Talk the whole thing away. No pleasure in anything if you mouth it up too much" (*Stories* 33). Yet by writing "Macomber," a "mouthing up" of fears about male feminization, Hemingway himself violates Wilson's advice. If, strictly speaking, Wilson's attitude would proscribe male authorship, Hemingway finds room for it by underlining male stoicism and expressive restraint while simultaneously indexing a melodramatically suffering male subject that pleads—always implicitly—for sympathy and respect.[8]

Iceberg theory is crucial to this narrative feat in that the burden of discovering and analyzing male emotion is shifted to the reader, sparing the Hemingwayesque narrator the indignity of having to discourse too directly on his own suffering. Thus the technique does not seek to banish

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male emotion but only to stylize its expression. Indeed, this suppression has the rhetorical effect of intensification. If Hemingway's proper man is like his iceberg, then the metaphor suggests both repression and a kind of portentous, veiled expression: though seven-eighths of his emotional being may be moving in tearful riot below the surface, the iceberg man presents to observers a "dignified," dry-eyed mien—all the while encouraging sympathetic speculation about what is happening in those depths. The technique is thus a form of male masochism, as male suffering is pleasurably indulged and exhibited by the very restraint that ostensibly hides it.

If Jake is an embodiment of iceberg masculinity, what operates below the surface centers on his response to Brett. Though his genital wound predates his romantic involvement with her, she makes it consequential and humiliating, and she inflicts similar pain on Robert Cohn, Pedro Romero, and Mike Campbell. Indeed, *The Sun Also Rises* accords to women a frighteningly personal power to wound, despite their lack of real social power. Hemingway directs attention away from women's social powerlessness (Brett is broke and relies on men to support her hedonistic lifestyle) to the capacity of individual women to rend individual men. This is a strategic substitution. As Sally Robinson argues, "Representations of wounded white men most often work to *personalize* the crisis of white masculinity and, thus, to erase its social and political causes and effects" (8; Robinson's italics). Though Jake was wounded in the war, the trauma of that wound is also potently linked to the "battle of the sexes" identified by Gilbert and Gubar. In Hemingway's version of this representational war, women have the power to feminize men even when they are themselves disempowered, a construction that shifts the focus from women's collective grievances to individual male ones.[9]

To adopt woman as a signifier of male suffering is to erase the structural causes of female suffering almost completely. Brett's castrating sexuality—the keynote of her characterization—is central to this erasure. Brett "turn[s] all to jelly" when Jake touches her, goes off with Cohn for a tryst in San Sebastian, and finally lays libidinous eyes on the young bullfighter Pedro Romero (26). She herself worries that her actions are those of a "bitch," and she ultimately reins in her desires to spare Romero from destruction: "I'm thirty-four, you know. I'm not going to be one of these bitches that ruins children" (242). Though her change of heart, if credible, does seem to illustrate one conventional interpretation of the

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novel—Hemingway's desire to offer an ethical response to the lostness of the lost generation, we are given little reason to believe that Brett will be able to control herself in the future. Jake suggests as much at the end, when, to her comment, "We could have had such a good time together," he responds, "Isn't it pretty to think so?" (247). Though Brett regrets her role in this particular iteration of sexual agency, Jake's gendered "pretty" suggests that it would be feminine naïveté to expect, in the future, anything less than more of the same.

Grace under feminization

Despite the novel's suggestion that female sexuality afflicts all men and male relations, Jake's own wound—the wound, that is, of a Hemingwayesque author—ultimately differentiates him from the novel's other characters in a way calculated to suggest Hemingway's artistic mastery. To trace the path from feminization to triumphant artistry we must further examine Jake's behavior under the blows of some intolerable humiliations.

Jake and Brett have an oblique conversation about proper masculine comportment in the early days of the fiesta. Jake notes that Cohn, who has refused to relinquish his romantic aspirations toward Brett despite her clear lack of interest, has "behaved very badly" (181). Brett agrees, "Damned badly. He had a chance to behave so well." The exchange restates the now-familiar paradox: male feminization can be a sort of opportunity for men, a chance to prove themselves by "behaving well"—that is, by resigning themselves to the inevitability of female sexual agency and thus to their own modern powerlessness. Brett compliments Jake: "You wouldn't behave badly" (181). And Jake behaves very properly indeed, maintaining his public passivity and iceberg emotionality (albeit with several private lapses) in the face of an astonishing series of mortifications.

Notably, Jake gets an opportunity to behave well as soon as Brett makes her first appearance. Brett is castrating to men if only in her all-desirableness, which necessarily pits men competitively against other men—yet she also feminizes the victors, the men she sleeps with. The boon of being chosen is short-lived, as men quickly discover the capricious and temporary nature of their selection—which only intensifies their competitiveness. Jake's Hemingwayesque qualities seem to win her love, but no man can possess her body with any permanence.

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Jake feels the mockery of this situation at the *bal musette* when Brett drunkenly enters the club with a group of effeminate, apparently gay men. Jake is intensely angry to see Brett in the company of such men, whose mere presence associates her with a sort of sexual anarchy, a refusal to respect the bounds of sexual propriety and proper object choice: "With them was Brett. She looked very lovely and she was very much with them" (20). A moment later, he repeats it—a sticking point: "And with them was Brett." Brett is not just with the men but *with* them, *allied* with them in transgressing traditional sexual boundaries. Though Hemingway often represents sexual role exchange in intimate and heterosexual contexts, in this public context, Brett's embrace of male homosexuality suggests a sort of pathology by association. But Jake's anger with these men, in contrast with his muted reaction to more intense humiliations ahead, is significant for a more crucial reason: they challenge Jake's face-saving performance ethic. To borrow David Savran's phrase, Jake can "take it like a man" when some other feminized man sleeps with his beloved, but that suffering, and the high dignity with which it is invested, is mocked when Brett is "with" these particular men.

Play and parody are key, since Brett's gay friends take gender roles as opportunities for jest and impersonation, as when one affects the idiom of a Southern belle: "I do declare. There is an actual harlot" (20). With their campy refusal to take seriously the gendered dicta through which Jake negotiates his powerlessness, they make a mockery of his predicament, revealing him, indeed, as something of a drama queen. If Jake's manhood is defined as a certain order and manner of suffering at the hands of woman, this masochistic tableau is dangerously queered by any suggestion of the artificiality of gender categories. The men playfully inhabit a social space that is to Jake a hell—to be a man in a supplementary position to a woman. Laughing and "simpering," they offer a view of that unhegemonic position deprived of its (iceberglike) submerged majesty, deprived especially of its "dignifying" trauma, as if to be unmanned were simply a lark. Thus, rather than parodying masculinity, the men parody male feminization, depriving it of its ennobling potential—ennobling, that is, when properly indexed under the tenets of iceberg aesthetics.

Later in the evening, however, we see this aesthetic properly, seriously performed, as if to recuperate it from the contamination of the *bal musette* scene. When Brett takes up with another suitor, Jake excuses himself with a "rotten headache" and returns without evident emotion to his apart-

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ment, where he methodically reads his mail and newspapers. Even in alluding to his wounding—"The old grievance. Well, it was a rotten way to be wounded and flying on a joke front like the Italian"—his affect is grimly humorous. Yet Jake is distraught, has been, it seems, distraught all along, as we find out in the following (flatly delivered) reportage:

> I lay awake thinking and my mind jumping around. Then I couldn't keep away from it, and I started to think about Brett and all the rest of it went away. I was thinking about Brett and my mind stopped jumping around and started to go in sort of smooth waves. Then all of a sudden I started to cry. Then after a while it was better and I lay in bed and listened to the heavy trams go by and way down the street, and then I went to sleep. (31)

Revealing his trauma, Jake keeps a tight grip on "it." Repeated three times, this "it" each time indexes—without articulating—a different stage of his suffering. The first "it," keeping Jake's mind jumping, would seem to be the existential kernel of feminization itself—the humiliation of Jake's "bitched" modern existence, including his thwarted love for Brett. The second "it" abstracts the existential pain from Jake's suffering: thinking of Brett, all the rest of "it"—his generalized angst—goes away. After he cries, shocking in the context of his dispassionate narration, "it" gets better. Jake backs away from his encounter with these unnamed reals, which tells us not only of his lonely condition of disempowerment but also of his seemly comportment under that curse, his adherence—notwithstanding these austerely described tears—to proper iceberg masculinity. Yet he has given us few specifics about his suffering; "it" has guaranteed Jake's dignity by remaining submerged, however much we as readers are enjoined to theorize about the invisible depths of his crisis.

At Brett's side in Paris and Pamplona, Jake is pathetically unprotected from his feminization at Brett's hands. It is thus neither minimized nor ironicized—though at one point it is strangely eroticized. When Brett stops in with Count Mippipopolous, Jake lies face down on his bed in the other room listening to their voices and feeling "rotten"—an iceberg adjective that, like *sore,* names a feeling without indulging in untoward analysis. When Brett comes in to comfort him, he gushes, "Oh, Brett, I love you so much" (54). She comforts him richly, maternally: "Poor old darling," stroking his head as he lies facing away from her—a classically

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melodramatic pose suggesting a crying child or a woman spurned. Yet in this almost pleasurable lapse from stoicism, Jake has not lost control so much as ceded it—to Brett. He thus behaves well by surrendering to Brett's will, reminding us not only of his hurt but also of his resignation, a vital preliminary to facing (or facing down) the hard fact of modern male feminization.

Later at Zelli's, Brett's promiscuity seems to have extended to miscegenation, and here again we encounter racial difference converted into a kind of gender inauthenticity. Hemingway disposes of this racial threat just as he did with Cohn, by using racial difference to assert the superiority not of whiteness as such but of Jake's Hemingwayesque masculinity, an ideal for which whiteness is a necessary but not sufficient condition. Jake is dancing with Brett near the stage when she greets the "nigger drummer," explaining, "he's a great friend of mine. . . . Damn good drummer too" (62). Conscious only of his new rival's bodily difference ("He was all lips and teeth") Jake cannot escape the man's invasive shouts, chants, and smiles, an intimation of black male sexuality that may—by the delicate mode of implication required of the period's fiction—have worked the same sweaty magic on Brett that now moves the dancers ecstatically about the floor.

Physicalized too is the novel's other black man, a boxer whom Bill Gorton has rescued from an angry crowd in Vienna. Bill drunkenly narrates:

> Wonderful nigger. Looked like Tiger Flores, only four times as big. All of a sudden everybody started to throw things. Not me. Nigger'd just knocked local boy down. Nigger put up his glove. Wanted to make a speech. . . . Then local white boy hit him. Then he knocked white boy cold. Then everybody commenced to throw chairs. (71)

Bill's "local boy" interestingly becomes a "white boy" when he is overmatched by his black opponent. And indeed, the point of Bill's story turns out to be the vast physical superiority of the black boxer: "'My God, Mr. Gorton,' said the nigger, 'I didn't do nothing in there for forty minutes but try and let him stay. That white boy musta ruptured himself swinging at me. I never did hit him'" (71). Though Bill's anecdote may seem a mere flourish, Jake himself is a "white boy" who, in a sense, "ruptured himself swinging" at an enemy. And Hemingway's association of blackness with

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physical and sexual mastery reminds us of Jake's pointed dissociation with such measures of manhood. A black man may demonstrate superiority in the ring or in bed, but Hemingway evokes such traditional proofs of masculinity in order to devalue them in favor of Jake's moral and intellectual exclusivity. Indeed, both of the novel's incidental black men display a childish simplicity that contrasts sharply with Jake's highly sentient, world-weary suffering.

The novel's heavy reliance on such contrasts suggests the importance of exclusivity to Hemingway's self-constructions in and beyond his fiction. In jibes at writers like Poe ("skillful . . . dead" [*Green Hills* 20]), Hawthorne, Emerson, and Whittier ("very good men with the small, dried, and excellent wisdom of Unitarians" [21]), Henry James (his fictional men "all talked like fairies" [qtd. in Baker 189]), T. S. Eliot ("you cannot couple T. S. Eliot and Joseph Conrad in a sentence seriously and not laugh" [qtd. in Reynolds 226]), Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Sherwood Anderson, and others, Hemingway suggested the exclusivity of his own modernist aesthetic, despite its orthodoxy in the context of the doctrine of impersonality examined above. Presented in *The Sun Also Rises* less as a series of artistic choices than as criteria for manhood, that aesthetic seems to have exclusion as its primary function. Perhaps jealousy and anxiety motivated these literary criticisms, but that is just the point: Hemingway used *The Sun Also Rises* to define masculinity in a way that would exalt himself and exclude most of those peers who were, in 1925, regarded as his professional betters.

If Hemingway's representation of feminization frames a kind of miserable domitability as the human condition, it also casts his apprehension of that fact as evidence of his own epistemological supremacy, saying, in effect, that in the land of the blind, a one-eyed man is king. The novel's roster of the disempowered also includes Brett, who, though she has power over men, is less than free in many other ways—in her alcoholism and libido, in her economic thralldom to men, and in the romantic delusions that cause her to seek out, as she does with Romero, "true love." This fact, that the novel's most powerful character is herself dominated, suggests that Hemingway wants to call into question almost all claims of cultural authority besides his own. The fatuity of such claims is contrasted with the dignified suffering and enlightened epistemological stance of the Hemingwayesque modernist author, a man who is willing—and intellectually and emotionally able—to confront the basic facts of modern

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existence. In effect, acknowledging feminization and rightly behaving in response to it creates a kind of exemption from some its most damning ramifications. Thus does Hemingway wrest cultural authority from his very sense (or fear) of disempowerment.

"All shot to hell"

Jake arrives at this mastery late in the novel, only after sounding the depths of the feminization that is its precondition. That feminization reaches its nadir when Brett finally goes off with Romero. Their affair has led to a climactic bullfight in which the matador, beaten up badly by Cohn the night before, triumphs over a series of bulls the next day despite his hurts. As Romero is carried off on the shoulders of the crowd, Jake aches with the young bullfighter:

> They were all around him trying to lift him and put him on their shoulders. He fought and twisted away, and started running . . . toward the exit. He did not want to be carried on people's shoulders. But they held him and lifted him. It was uncomfortable and his legs were spraddled and his body was very sore. (221)

Imaginatively entering into Romero's pain, Jake reminds us of its cause—the beating by Cohn. Thus even in the midst of his triumph, we are reminded of the matador's feminization. Though this defeat ironically allows Romero to behave well—he rises again and again to fight Cohn despite clearly being overmatched, and admirably fulfils his professional responsibilities the next day despite his condition—his heroism, if made more poignant by his being dominated by Cohn, is also circumscribed by it.

Hemingway, however, can achieve what Romero cannot: an *artistic* heroism that allows him rhetorically to transcend feminization. Though Romero's bullfighting metaphorically evokes the art of a Hemingwayesque writer—in action he is "straight and pure and natural in line" (167) and a producer of "real emotion" as opposed to the "fake emotional feeling" (168) produced by most bullfighters—this implicit metaphor cuts only one way. A writer, that is, may do as a bullfighter does, achieving purity of line and "real emotion," but the bullfighter can never approach the (true) writer's art, especially if, like Romero, he is invested in the masculine dominance ritualized by the bullfight. Compared to that of Jake,

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Romero's response to feminization is unreflective and self-destructive—in a word, unmodern. His Old World belief in masculine dominance—evidenced in his wanting to "tame" Brett through marriage and by making her grow out her hair—appears childishly ineffectual beside Jake's mature resignation. Romero fails to recognize the hard modern reality at the center of the novel: the emergent supremacy of female sexual agency.

Jake, of course, has a devastating appreciation of this reality. When Brett telegraphs him to fetch her from Madrid after she has left Romero, he signs the return cable "Love Jake" and reflects:

> That seemed to handle it. That was it. Send a girl off with one man. Introduce her to another to go off with him. Now go and bring her back. And sign the cable with love. That was it all right. I went in to lunch. (239)

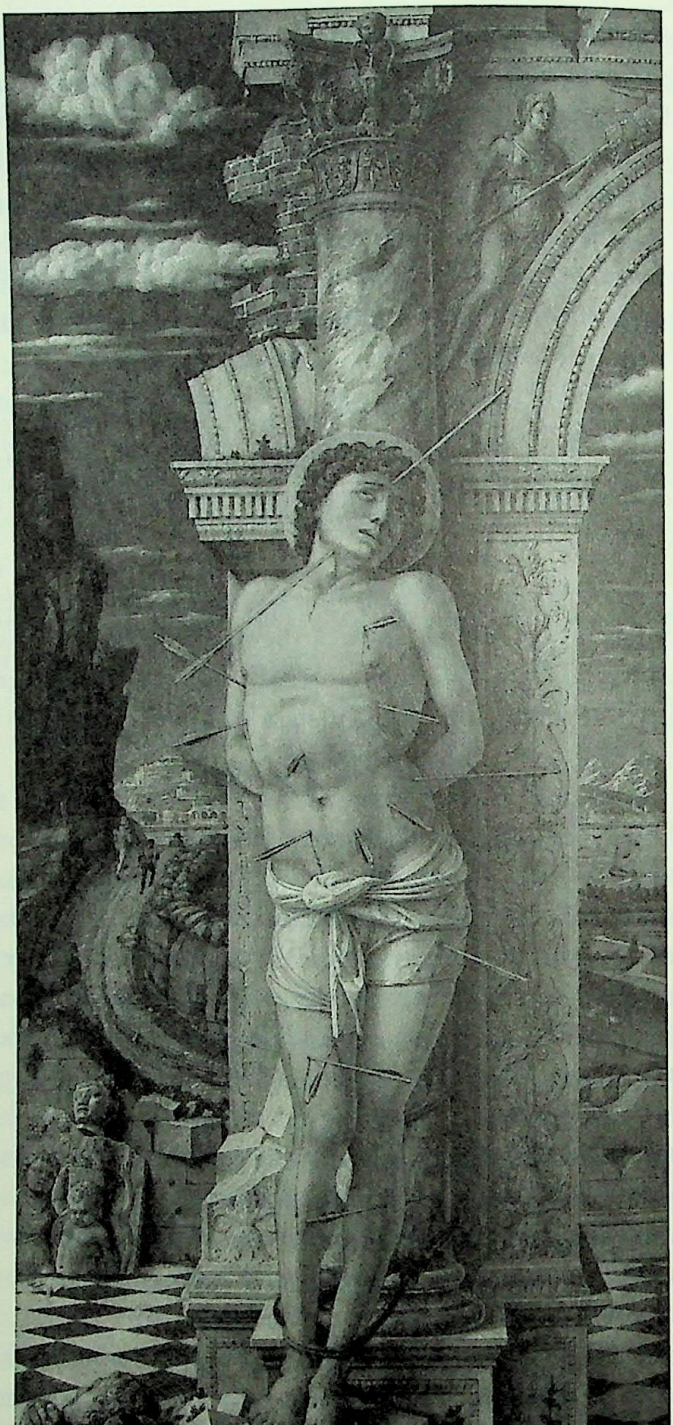
Another series of *its* suggests the importance of what Jake is encountering—a summary of his feminization at the hands of modern woman. But what has happened that Jake can so casually end this momentous reflection by going to lunch? Whence this state of detachment, this condition at once despairing and coolly accepting?

With Hemingway's iceberg emphasis on hidden depths, it should not surprise us that Jake achieves this state while underwater, shortly before he receives Brett's cable. Jake has traveled alone to San Sebastian, the site of Cohn and Brett's dalliance just weeks before, and a city named after the oft-painted saint who was traditionally depicted bound to a column, pierced from every side with arrows.[10] San Sebastian is thus a sort of symbolic epicenter of feminization, evoking not only Brett's sexual agency but its result: masculinity beset—immobilized, wounded, penetrated from all sides. Though critics have sensed the importance of this chapter, most have tended to frame its action in the simple terms of disappointed romance—Jake finally accepting the impossibility of his love relationship with Brett.[11] Yet what Jake comes to terms with is a harder and more surprising fact: modern male powerlessness ending what had seemed to be a timeless patriarchal supremacy.

This realization begins atop a raft for swimmers where Jake sits with a paradigmatic pair of young lovers, blissfully, casually absorbed in each other and isolated by the sea. The planks of the raft are comfortingly hot in contrast to the cold water around it, and the girl has undone the top of her suit and is "browning her back" (235) in the sun. As the boy talks

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Andrea Mantegna. *St. Sebastian.* Kunsthistorisches Museum, Wien.

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to her, the girl laughs and turns her "brown back in the sun," a repetition that emphasizes the sexual glamour and romantic allure from which Jake is estranged. Leaving that primal heterosexual scene, Jake dives "deep once, swimming down to the bottom. I swam with my eyes open and it was green and dark." Above him the raft, with its pair of lovers—who at this late point we know are probably doomed romantics—"made a dark shadow." Almost nothing, of course, has happened, yet we can recognize the moment as a quiet epiphany. Baldly put, Jake has taken his departure from the doomed, islanded happiness suggested by the raft and literally opened his eyes to "dark" reality: the male disempowerment and benighted romanticism in modern heterosexual relations.

Jake's epiphany even has a punch line. Brett's telegram means that Jake will have to cut short his vacation to join her in Madrid. He deadpans, "Well that meant San Sebastian all shot to hell" (239). Painting the last arrow in his portrait of the artist as woman-martyred modern man, Jake is just as "shot to hell"—bound, dominated, penetrated—as the saint he jokingly evokes. Yet at this point, penetration may be less relevant than beatification—the process by which a wounded, vanquished man becomes elevated by and reverenced for his suffering. Saint Sebastian is often figured with eyes cast toward heaven, suggesting, even in his agony, the serenity of divine sanction. Jake's decision to go to lunch suggests a similar, if seriocomic serenity. Indeed one might argue that a connection between healthy appetite and inward serenity is a constant in Hemingway's oeuvre, a congenial "objective correlative" for an author obsessed with eating, drinking, and living fully (239).

When Jake arrives in Madrid, his elevation seems to coincide with Brett's diminution. Noting the disarray of her hotel room, he tells us, "She kissed me, and while she kissed me I could feel she was thinking of something else. She was trembling in my arms. She felt very small" (241). Here Jake seems to reevaluate the devastated Brett, who has proven just as subject to disempowerment as the men she unmans. Though in leaving Romero, Brett seems to have resisted her profligate tendencies—and is trying to feel good about it—it is Jake who is sanguine. He has returned to himself, insisting, Hemingway-like, on his pleasures, telling the barman (as one issuing a declaration), "I like an olive in my martini" and taking Brett to eat not in some dive but at Botin's, "one of the best restaurants in the world" (245–46). There he partakes lustily. Without appetite herself, Brett notes Jake's returned vigor: "You like to eat, don't you?" "Yes," he answers, "I like to do a lot of things" (246).

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After lunch, riding down Madrid's Gran Via, Brett invites Jake into their familiar dynamic: "Oh, Jake, we could have had such a damned good time together." Jake, however, now surpasses Brett's limited understanding of their shared reality. Instead of responding immediately, he notes ahead a mounted traffic cop, his raised baton evoking law and consequence. Indeed, law is precisely what Jake has come to terms with—a bleak modern law of male feminization under which he has long suffered but now owns as a kind of exclusive and elevating knowledge. The car slows, pressing Brett closer against him, but Jake sees this apparent unity for the radical separation it really is. Gently declining Brett's invitation from a point of view beyond all such comely illusions, he replies calmly, agreeably: "Yes, isn't it pretty to think so?"

Notes

1. John Raeburn reports that press accounts of Hemingway's life in the early 1920s frequently embroidered his manly exploits, though he also suggests that Hemingway may have started some of these legends himself (23–25). From childhood an admirer of Teddy Roosevelt and the "strenuous life," Hemingway was noted among his Parisian acquaintances—and in early press accounts—for his boxing skills, for amateur bullfighting, and for his (voluble) devotion to any and all forms of athletic prowess. In addition, Hemingway was at this time, according to Robert Mammon, "talking a great deal about courage, and how a man needs to test himself to prove to himself he can take it" (qtd. in Reynolds 214). Reynolds comments: "With Roosevelt as role model, Hemingway was never completely satisfied with being merely a writer. . . . All his life he was in search of America's mythical West . . . where a man stood alone, physical, and self-reliant" (25). As I will argue, this ideal had a heavy, if paradoxical, formal impact on Hemingway's art, where unease at being "merely a writer" is assuaged through an emphasis on manly epistemological mastery.

2. Cassandra Laity, and more recently Ann Ardis, have argued that the figure of the decadent Wildean aesthete lies behind some aspects of modernist masculinization. But John Gaggin, echoing Hugh Kenner in *A Homemade World,* suggests that Hemingway and mentors Pound and Stein had much in common with the decadents, especially a privileging of craft, of *ars gratis,* and an ideal of artistic detachment. Ardis's finding that the "Joyce-Pound-Eliot strand of modernism" marked a "retreat from a supposed valuing of scandalous sexuality in the wake of Oscar Wilde's trials" (7) thus contextualizes Hemingway's own apparent need to masculinize authorship as a kind of reaction formation to his sense of a decadent authorial paternity. See also Frank Lentricchia.

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3. In *Modernism, Mass Culture, and Professionalism,* Thomas Strychacz argues that modernist writing strategies shared a "profound identity" with the "ethos of professionalism" (26) that was emerging in the American middle class at this time. At the heart of this ethos is the "symbolic capital" accruing to expert knowledge and esoteric discourse, especially in contradistinction to the discourses of mass culture. For Strychacz, both modernist writing and professional discourses

> emerge at the same time in response to a common historical necessity. If a body of formal knowledge underpins a professional's power within mass society, then the idiom of modernist writing—arcane allusion, juxtaposition, opaque writing, indeterminacy, and so on—performs precisely the same function within mass culture. (27)

However, the difficulty of modernist writing is not only this esoteric character, which might take the form of a very indoors form of pedantry, but the suffering on which one can focus the kind of "scientific" attention that Hemingway recommends to Fitzgerald.

4. Leverenz's *Manhood and the American Renaissance* and Alfred Habegger's *Gender, Fantasy, and Realism in American Literature* were perhaps the first works to explicitly address the impact of gender anxieties on male authorship. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Between Men* and *Epistemology of the Closet* remain crucial studies of nineteenth-century male authorial anxieties and were a central inspiration for this essay, as was Lora Romero's chapter on Nathaniel Hawthorne in *Home Fronts.* And Bell's *The Problem of American Realism,* in its focus on the epistemological trappings and self-distinguishing truth claims of literary realists and naturalists (terms Bell would problematize), was important to my understanding of the epistemological stakes of male-produced modernisms. I am also indebted for many insights to Scott S. Derrick, whose *Monumental Anxieties* was another central model for this study. Most important has been Derrick's emphasis on masculinity and the cultural authority of authorship, which he suggests

> may, in fact, serve as one of the chief motives of the writing process. . . . The subject of a narrative, then, may be generated as a vehicle for a desire to achieve the imagined good of authorship and thus serve as a narrativization of this desire. (23)

5. In a 1947 letter written to William Faulkner, Hemingway discusses the literary boxing prospects of John Dos Passos ("a 2nd rate writer on acct. no ear. 2nd rate boxer has no left hand, same as ear to writer, and so gets his brains knocked out"), Turgenev ("beat Turgenev, which we both did soundly"), and De Maupassant ("still dangerous for three rounds") (*Letters* 622). This dismissal

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of the French short story writer's staying power suggests Hemingway's idea of the novel as the more challenging and decisive form, requiring the writer to stay in the ring longer. This may explain why Hemingway's novels are more manipulatively self-constructive and fraught with authorial anxieties than his stories.

He used the same boxing metaphor in a letter to Charles Scribner two years later, boasting of being a "man without ambition except to be champion of the world." In his bout with Henry James, he would "hit him where he had no balls and ask the referee to stop it" (673).

6. Theories of androgyny accounting for Hemingway's simultaneous hypermasculinity and obsession with sexual role exchange began with the posthumous release of *The Garden of Eden* in 1986 and Kenneth Lynn's 1987 biography. Then Mark Spilka complicated the picture with his 1990 study *Hemingway's Quarrel with Androgyny,* which argued that androgyny was an Edenic state Hemingway felt he must repudiate throughout his career. More recently, Thomas Strychacz makes a case for Hemingway's sexual progressivism in *Hemingway's Theatres of Masculinity* (2003), which argues that Hemingway's work "predicts the formidable critique of masculinity raised by feminist studies" (10).

7. John Raeburn suggests that Hemingway used his nonfiction and magazine writing as a sort of autobiographical countercanon in which he made a case for a broad, middlebrow acceptance not dependent on his literary endeavors. But Raeburn discounts the way the novels and stories might work to secure a similar acceptance from highbrow audiences—as in *The Sun Also Rises,* with its elevation of Jake's vocationally specific intellectual and moral "masculinities."

8. For an alternative account of Hemingway's style and handling of emotion, see Thomas Strychacz's "The Sort of Thing You Should Not Admit."

9. Cohn's fiancée Frances Cline also illustrates this phenomenon, her wounding viciousness representationally outweighing the wrongs being done to her by Cohn.

10. Hemingway's representation of feminization shares the erotic masochism found in some Renaissance representations of the saint, yet I take his implied identification with this homoerotic icon as a hard-boiled joke on his own male disempowerment. The issue is complicated by the author's frequent representations of sexual role reversal and moments of emerging homoeroticism in his works, as well as his own suggestion, in *The Garden of Eden* and elsewhere, that he may have enjoyed being sodomized by his wives; yet these clues no more connote homosexuality than any number of other sexual proclivities. Still, though I have no stake in protecting Hemingway from suggestions of homo-

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sexuality and would be unsurprised by any future revelations of same, I understand such fantasies in his work in the context of his implicit complaints about the burdensomeness of normative masculinity, even as he worked to naturalize it. That is, homoeroticism (as in the sexually suggestive "male idyll" scene in *The Sun Also Rises*) and episodes of sexual role reversal allow Hemingway's male characters to escape the angst and competition between men that is occasioned by female sexuality.

11. I am indebted to Ellen Andrews Knodt for pointing out this minimalist epiphany, though I assign it a broader set of significations.

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Reviews

The Négritude Renaissance

The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism
by Brent Hayes Edwards
Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003. 397 pages

Michael Soto

Whenever I type *diaspora* on my computer, my word processing program, from a certain well-known company in Seattle, tries to persuade me that the word really deserves a capital *D*. I do not know whether the program pays tribute to global Jewish culture, Pan-African civilization, or some other capital-*D* Diaspora, but I am glad I still have the option to "misspell" the word. Throughout *The Practice of Diaspora,* Brent Hayes Edwards scrupulously resists the urge, human or mechanical, to capitalize *diaspora,* and this small gesture seems truly fitting, for among the book's many important contributions is a reminder that the idea of a unified, global, Pan-African, capital-*D* Diaspora is an invention of late twentieth-century idealists. For much of the early twentieth century, whether in pre-Négritude Paris or in renaissance Harlem, black intellectuals took up multiple banners of internationalism—sometimes to underscore homegrown racism, sometimes to resist the dehumanizing effects of colonial oppression, sometimes for seemingly apolitical purposes—and *diaspora* (with or without the capital *D*) never entered the discussion. Edwards, noting the "diversity of black takes on *diaspora*" (12), demands greater awareness of the term's slippery generalization and a commitment to the hard facts of its many varieties in practice:

> The use of the term *diaspora* . . . implies neither that it offers the comfort of abstraction, an easy recourse to origins, nor that it provides a foolproof anti-essentialism: instead, it forces us to articulate discourses of cultural and political linkage only through and across difference in full view of the risks of that endeavor. (13)

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It is one thing to offer such a note of theoretical caution; it is another thing actually to live up to the idea's promise. *The Practice of Diaspora* fully lives up to its promise in its many lively, provocative, and painstakingly researched analyses of important black shapers of culture from the first half of the twentieth century. (I hesitate to say "writers" or "intellectuals" because some of the figures Edwards brings up—"Bricktop" [Ada Smith] or Josephine Baker, for example—do not fit comfortably into these categories.) Even when I find myself disagreeing with Edwards—I think he undervalues the specifically nationalist dimension of Harlem Renaissance cultural discourse, for example—I cannot help but admire the transcontinental reach of his archival research, the sharp focus on international acquaintances that scholars mention only in passing (if at all), and the utterly clever explication of tactical or accidental translingual figures of speech. Because *The Practice of Diaspora* heeds its own advice, because it foregrounds difference at the expense of developing an overarching theory of diaspora, Edwards does not always do justice to the significance of its more lasting contributions. In the final sentence, for instance, Edwards sheepishly offers that "[b]lack internationalism . . . is less like a sturdy edifice or a definitive program than like the uncertain harmony of a new song" (318). As refreshing as jazz-inspired indirection may be for the reader, the sentiment poses no small stumbling block for the reviewer; all the same, I will propose three ways in which the book might reshape our understanding of twentieth-century literature.

First, *The Practice of Diaspora* places its sharp focus squarely on the international contours of the movement typically called the Harlem Renaissance. (In fact, to signal his discomfort with the phrase, Edwards sets off *Harlem Renaissance* with quotation marks throughout the text. Before Langston Hughes rechristened it the Harlem Renaissance in *The Big Sea* [1940], most black intellectuals called it the Negro Renaissance.) There is really nothing new here—critics have complained for so long that the Harlem Renaissance was really a national and international movement that there's no one left to complain to—but Edwards has pushed the transnational historical connections and their cultural implications further than anyone before him. His work on transnational and translingual publishing efforts, centered on (but hardly limited to) Francophone cultural journals, is a groundbreaking achievement, on a par with Abby Arthur Johnson and Ronald Maberry Johnson's work on early twentieth-century African American periodicals. Thanks to the Johnsons, no discussion of

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the Harlem Renaissance is complete without a consideration of *Crisis, Fire!!, Messenger,* and *Opportunity;* thanks to Edwards, the same is now true (one hopes) of *Le Cri des Nègres, La Dépêche africaine,* and *La Revue de monde noir.*

Second, *The Practice of Diaspora* suggests the importance to Harlem Renaissance studies (and to twentieth-century literary studies more broadly) of René Maran, the Martiniquan writer who won the prestigious Prix Goncourt in 1921; George Padmore, the Trinidadian labor organizer and communist (and subsequently anticommunist) intellectual; and Tiemoko Garan Kouyaté, the Sudanese editor and anticolonial activist. These names will be familiar to students of the Négritude movement if not to students of literary modernism, and thanks to Edwards, they appear natural alongside such Harlem Renaissance staples as W. E. B. Du Bois, Jessie Fauset, Langston Hughes, Alain Locke, and Claude McKay (all of whom receive ample attention in *The Practice of Diaspora*). Less familiar but perhaps most important in Edwards's reconfiguration of the literary historical landscape is Paulette Nardal. Born in Martinique in 1896, Nardal learned English in the British West Indies and took a graduate degree at the Sorbonne. After writing for the Parisian journal *La Dépêche africaine,* she cofounded, with Haitian dentist Léo Sajous, *La Revue de monde noir,* a bilingual (French-English) journal that helped launch what would become the Négritude movement. Weaving together publishing history, a detailed study of Paris salon life, and a keen sense of what is forbidden from literary historical view, Edwards makes a strong case that "Nardal became the most important connection between the 'Harlem Renaissance' writers and the Francophone university students who would become the core of the Négritude movement" (119), and therefore that she represents an important and previously underestimated nexus in twentieth-century cultural history.

Third, *The Practice of Diaspora,* in the compelling examples of Nardal and many others, demonstrates that diaspora is best understood as a diverse and often conflicted network of loosely or strongly affiliated discursive practices. It is in this sense that jazz-inspired circumlocutions (rather than heavy-handed cultural theories) ring truest. In a lucid discussion of a well-known Hughes poem, Edwards rhetorically asks:

> Does "Jazz Band in a Parisian Cabaret" imagine that [music audience] collectivity in any broader sense? Does it represent

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> anything that might approach Jane Nardal's [Paulette's sister] *internationalisme noir?* To ask such a question, of course, is to suggest a complex articulation of the disparate instances of formalist strategies (at a wide variety of points in transnational print culture) to frame blackness as an object of knowledge beyond the nation-state. (67)

What seems at first like a rhetorically tentative approach ("to suggest," "complex articulation," "disparate instances," "wide variety of points") to a dubious epistemological proposition ("blackness as an object of knowledge") emerges in the end as the only sensible, the only *true* way to account for an unstable and still-emergent mountain of evidence. Edwards is fittingly suggestive about black internationalism, a category so obviously beyond the scope of antiessentialist dogma and so obviously deserving of substance rather than abstraction. *The Practice of Diaspora* allows us to take up important and precarious questions—Might the Harlem Renaissance be considered a form of postcolonial intervention? How does the machinery of print capitalism respond to revolutionary cultural movements? Under what conditions does race trump gender (and vice versa) in cultural and intellectual history?—on the best possible footing.

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Recovering Empire's Critics

Colonial Strangers:
Women Writing the End of the British Empire
by Phyllis Lassner
New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004. 241 pages

Annette Gilson

In the fall of 2004 Prince Harry of Wales was photographed at an exclusive party whose theme was Colonials and Natives. The prince came dressed in a Nazi SS uniform. The party's theme suggests that, for the wealthy elite of Britain, the memory of the empire lives on as part of the heritage of privilege. That Prince Harry wore a Nazi uniform suggests that although Britain and Germany were on opposite sides in World War II, there were similarities between them in their position as imperial forces. Indeed, perhaps these similarities will become more obvious with time, as people born decades after the war feel freer to gloss over the sufferings and privations it created and to feel nostalgia for glamorized images of power and intrigue that they associate with imperial Europe. That these glamorized images thrive today, in spite of the observance of Holocaust Memorial Day in the UK, suggests that the meaning of World War II continues to be contested.

Phyllis Lassner's *Colonial Strangers* investigates the relationship between colonial Britain and World War II. Lassner, a scholar of British and Irish literature of the modern and interwar periods, has made herself proficient in postcolonial theory in order to perform this investigation because she believes that postcolonial investigations have by and large ignored the relationship between World War II and the end of the British empire. She uses her proficiency to show how most postcolonial theorists, despite their interest in racialized discourse and its effects on imperial policy and practice, have omitted from their various paradigms an exploration of World War II and the racialized, eugenics-based discourse employed by the Nazis. This discourse was essential to the Nazis' program, enabling them to designate as degenerate (and then to wipe out) certain groups of people, in particular Jews and Gypsies. She observes:

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> despite the fact that World War II was launched by the Axis powers as an imperial conquest based on racialist ideology and precipitated the end of all European empires, there has been little attempt to integrate this most cataclysmic event into the racially defined and ever-expanding and complicated postcolonial narrative. (3)

One of Lassner's focal concerns is to examine ways in which the British, as they waged war against the Axis powers, were compromised or challenged in their war effort by their investment in their imperial ventures. She came to choose this particular focus, she explains in the preface, through her studies of British women writers of World War II for her previous book, *British Women Writers of World War II: Battlegrounds of Their Own*. (Before that, Lassner wrote two studies of the Anglo-Irish writer Elizabeth Bowen.) As she studied the works of British women writers, she discovered among some of them a preoccupation with the problem of their colonial identity as they waged a war for freedom against another colonial power. Their experience confronting the Nazi imperial plan convinced them, Lassner states, "that all empires must end" (6).

Of course, the British had been comparing themselves to other European empires for centuries, and indeed, one way they justified their continued imperial activity was through this comparison. They believed, or wanted to believe, that their empire was the morally superior imperial force because it improved the lives of its subjects, for example by suppressing suttee and female infant exposure in India in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and because it could regulate itself, having abolished the slave trade with the Emancipation Act of 1834. Though books such as *Heart of Darkness* have been viewed with suspicion in the last few decades because they replicate the power structures of empire, the suggestion that the British were self-serving when they claimed to have gone to Africa and Asia and the Americas to bring light to the darkness was not readily accepted by most Britons as they entered the twentieth century.

Why did this exercise in comparison and contrast, formerly so reassuring, finally break down? The writers Lassner studies in this book did not "creat[e] an equivalence" between the Nazis and the British, she notes. After all,

> colonialism is about brutal and murderous exploitation, but it is not about exterminating an entire people for the purpose of pu-

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> rifying the world of their poisonous presence, in short, through a purposefully conceived policy of lethal social engineering. (6)

Nevertheless, "For many British women writers who witnessed the Hitlerian translation of imperial racism into mass extermination, no further evidence was needed to prove that all empires must end."

For Lassner, the key to these writers' insights lay in their gender. As female members of the empire, their status was already marginalized, their positions—at least to some degree—always in question. She treats a large group of writers in this book, and their experiences with the British Empire varied widely in personal biography and geographic location. The book consists of four chapters. The first chapter treats the Middle East and focuses on the work of Olivia Manning, Muriel Spark, and Ethel Mannin. The second chapter is concerned with India and features the work of Rumer Godden. The third chapter handles the British imperial presence in Kenya through the work of Elspeth Huxley, and the fourth chapter treats two Caribbean islands: Dominica through the work of Phyllis Shand Allfrey, and Jamaica through the work of Phyllis Bottome.

This brings us to this study's second major divergence from traditional postcolonial theoretical methodologies. In Lassner's view, engaged and trenchant critiques of colonialism have been erased simply because they were made by white colonial women writers. She points to the cases of Doris Lessing and Nadine Gordimer to illustrate the marginalization experienced by white women colonial critics:

> Despite or perhaps because of their prominence, [both writers] are often dismissed for false consciousness, that is, even as they represent the evils of apartheid, they are condemned either for the failure to represent the consciousness of the racialized colonized or for exploiting their consciousness for the care and feeding of white colonial creativity. (8)

She takes the postcolonial position that argues for the destabilization of the reductive oppositions of oppressor and victim (as these categories further deny the supposed victims all rights to subjectivity, agency, and voice) and uses it on behalf of white women colonials who are critiquing empire. This argument was developed in order to restore agency to the colonized members of a subject nation seeking emancipation—initially, colonized men. Later it was applied to colonized women by feminist

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postcolonial critics. It seems only fair, then, that Lassner applies it now to the colonial woman writer. She explains:

> colonial women are treated with equal doses of righteous indignation, depicted either as victims of men who coerced them from the manicured greens of Tunbridge Wells to the heat and dust of the Veil of Kashmir, or as agents of the imperial project, loading their Liberty chintzes onto the bent-over backs of their blacks. . . . Such criticism does not accept the possibility that colonial writers can have a political identity with integrity equal to that of the critic. (9)

Whether this extension can also be made to colonial men who critique empire is not a question Lassner takes up.

But it is refreshing to find Lassner as critic embracing the possibility that her women writers have as complex an understanding of political nuance and subtlety as she herself. She lets her women writers instruct her and follows their leads across the wide geographical vistas of the British Empire. In her opening chapter, *Strangers at the Gates,* Lassner focuses the first part of her discussion of Olivia Manning on Manning's 1951 novel *School for Love,* set in 1943-era Jerusalem, which was then the capital of British Mandatory Palestine. Lassner notes, "the crowded space of 1943 Jerusalem may be home to colonized Arabs and an ancient homeland for Jews fleeing Hitler's death camps, but it also encapsulates the imperial battle between European titans for control of the entire Middle East" (19), an observation that itself neatly encapsulates the analytical foci of Lassner's discussion, which is concerned with the way Manning casts the novel's romantic plot as an "accomplice to both global and localized racial violence," and indeed

> exposes the consequences of colonial power on novelistic romance and the fate of social and individual mobility. In turn, these imagined consequences highlight Manning's revelations about the corrupting circumstances of imperial power and their relationship to its racist and antisemitic discourses. (20)

From *School for Love,* Lassner turns to Manning's 1949 novel *An Artist Among the Missing* and her 1977–80 books *The Levant Trilogy,* all of which deal with wartime Egypt and Palestine. Lassner points to the way Manning figures the desert outposts—what postcolonial theory would define

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as the peripheries, that which is presumed to be the inevitable consequence of empire-building—as "resisting center[s]" that are "instrumental in the decentering of imperial power." Indeed, she argues, "El Alamein is a center of action that, even as it becomes the site of British victory, destabilizes the imperial presence" (35). Manning achieves this effect by giving voice (and presence and personal power) to the Egyptians who are critical of the ongoing British occupation. And in doing so,

> Manning provides a critical guide to the problems of representing indigenous peoples, not only by imaginative writers, but by theorists of colonialism and postcolonialism. . . . Even as [some British] characters are presented sympathetically as voices of conscience, their complicity with imperialism is not excused or considered irrelevant as though they were innocent bystanders. (37)

Indeed, Lassner notes, Manning includes within her novel a critique of her own subject position. To avoid using the native voice in a censoring or appropriating manner, the trilogy "represents the Egyptians as launching a critique of its author's self-conscious anticolonial questions. In its own counteroffensive, the combination of Egyptian voices and narrative strategy ironizes colonial discourse" and in this way "speaks out against the appropriation of natives' thoughts" (40).

Lassner turns next to Muriel Spark's 1965 novel *The Mandelbaum Gate,* set in the Middle East of 1961. It explores the complex relationship between religious and historical identity through a female character of Jewish and Protestant ancestry who has converted to Roman Catholicism and is traveling in Israel during the time of the Eichmann trial. Lassner's argument is intriguing: she concludes that Spark's sense of the "cheerfully hybrid identity of the British" (50) which her character embraces must finally give way to her realization that "her identity [in particular her Jewishness] may be conditioned by factors where choice is not only a fiction but no longer relevant" (51). This conclusion will most likely create critical dispute and discomfort among readers; nonetheless, it is provocative and should be taken seriously, even if one disagrees with it. It is also important to note that Lassner is taking to task the postcolonial idea of hybridity and disputing its conceptual validity.

She continues this exploration in her next section on Ethel Mannin's 1963 novel *The Road to Beersheba,* which explores the 1948 Arab-Israeli

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war from the perspective of Palestinian refugees. In a nuanced discussion of a novel that "imagines a British persona that empathizes and identifies with a unified Palestine cause" (60), Lassner discusses ways in which Mannin's novel challenges the reinscription of domestic roles as feminine during the postwar rebuilding phase and "shows how domestic and national stability are terms that retain their coherence only when national identity is not under fire" (62). She then points to the questions raised by Mannin's choice to base her British female character's hybrid identity on the fact of her having Arab physical features. She asks: "Can the Englishwoman only be made an authentic member of her Palestinian community and family if her face can pass as an Arab's?" (64). She notes:

> the domestic and political relationships established [in the novel] undermine the colonizing politics that rely on racial hierarchies and an irrevocable supremacist separateness. But what happens when this critique supports another kind of supremacism? (67)

She points to disturbing elements of Mannin's narrative, which,

> instead of finding legitimacy in the claims to Palestine of both Jews and Arabs . . . is created out of an opposition which pits a legitimate Palestinian identity struggling to retain its homeland and build "an independent democratic Arab state" against Zionist "pressure and tactics" and "Israeli terrorism." . . . In this interpretation, Palestinian history is naturalized, so that the people are one with the land, not in a racist replay of the black primitive, but as the regeneration of a high-achieving ancient civilization. In contrast, the Jewish presence in Palestine is a modern contrivance and the result not of ancient history, identification, or identity, but of modern Zionist ideology and invention. (65)

She also notes that Mannin "interprets the implications of 'the Nazi persecution of the Jews in Germany' not as leading to the murder of 6 million, but to being 'a powerful ally of Zionism'" (66). Though Lassner does not explore as fully the dilemma of the Palestinian position, in face of the novel's critical attitude toward Jews and the horror of Nazi Germany, this is understandable.

Turning to India, Lassner's second chapter treats a selection of the fiction (and the films made from the fiction) of Rumer Godden: *Black Narcissus* (novel and film), *Breakfast with the Nikolides, The River* (novel and

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film), and *Kingfishers Catch Fire.* Godden grew up in India in the early part of the twentieth century and later returned there with her own children when she sought refuge from the turmoil of World War II. She was deeply attached to India yet also recognized that her presence there was unavoidably fraught. As a result, she became a tireless critic of the "inauthentic and damaging neocolonial presence" (77) of the British there. Indeed, her life in India during the war (she was poisoned by a servant) led her to the personal and the artistic conclusion that "the only authentic healing the postcolonial Englishwoman can represent is to leave" (117). Here again, we see Lassner making a persuasive case for the political engagedness and truth-telling stance of her (post)colonial female author.

Lassner presents a nuanced argument describing the evolution of Godden's critique of the inevitably compromised position of British colonials in India, who—though they believe otherwise—can never leave behind the political dimension of their identities to retreat into the innocence of private life. Lassner also shows Godden's awareness of the ways in which the raj alienated (in different ways of course, and to differing degrees) British and Eurasian women, as well as Indians, each of whom experienced marginalization due to their racial and gender identities. Though Lassner reminds the reader at a number of junctures that behind the seemingly timeless lyricism of Godden's narratives we can recover relationships between political and narrative materials, the connection to World War II is not as strong as one would expect in this chapter, given the emphasis on that subject in the prefatory materials. But Lassner also expects the reader to do the work here of remembering the role played by World War II in the introduction of Indian independence. And the chapter is otherwise full and rich in its explorations of the interconnection between Godden's psychologically acute depictions of colonial subjectivity and the ways in which it is almost impossible for a colonial subject not to be complicit with the British colonial project, in that he or she inevitably feels desires that are produced by his or her access to that project's power and prerogatives.

The next chapter engages the work of Elspeth Huxley, an Englishwoman brought up in Kenya. The works treated include her memoir *The Flame Trees of Thika* (memoir and TV adaptation), the mystery thriller *African Poison Murders,* and the literary novels *The Walled City, A Thing to Love,* and *A Man from Nowhere.* Huxley left Kenya when she was eighteen, before that country's independence, and spent the rest of her life writing

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about Kenya and the African continent. Because she was white, Lassner notes, her focus on and love for Africa were viewed as suspect by some black African critics such as Chinua Achebe, who called her "the spokesman for the white settler community" (119). In part, this critical reception may be due to Huxley's 1954 (preindependence) vision for Kenya, which she believed could

> overcome its "inter-racial bickering" and find a way to create a new kind of nation out of "different customs, mentalities, standards of living and faiths" . . . which would include a place for European settlers, "the middle way between the white supremacy of South Africa and the black supremacy of the Gold Coast." (119)

But in saying this, Lassner argues, Huxley does not betray nostalgia for the old order in which she was raised. Rather, her fiction provides a "sustained critique of the romantic dreams through which British colonial settlement could justify its incursions" (120).

In her discussion of the evolution of Huxley's vision, Lassner paints a nuanced portrait of her subject's understanding of Africa and the racial discord and burgeoning violence that were instituted by years of European colonization. Here again World War II enters into the discussion, for the most part as the wider contextual backdrop to the novels' exploration of colonialism, though Lassner also points to ways in which Huxley shows that the Europeans' attempts to isolate themselves from world events are part of their larger denial of the real meaning of colonialism. This tendency, Lassner notes, "highlights the dangers of the settler community isolating itself not only from their black neighbors but from the geopolitical concerns that marked the continuum from the Great War" (137–38). Lassner admires Huxley's ability to maintain her self-critical stance even as she confronts retaliatory violence toward whites on the part of blacks, but she is sobered by the last novel in her discussion, *A Man from Nowhere,* in which "black Africans are nowhere to be seen or heard," which Lassner reads as "an ironic sign that they have totally demolished the imperial presence and perhaps its narrative as well" (158). Huxley had believed that she could offer her expertise in agriculture to black Africans and that this expertise would genuinely help them in their project to become self-sustaining and independent. But in *A Man from Nowhere* she represents a "colonial settler who belongs nowhere, does

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not even occupy the position of Other in the land which has rejected him," and Lassner notes that "this absence exposes the good intentions of the colonial project as a lack" (158). Huxley seems to recognize that her hopes have been exposed as part of "the waste and uselessness of white endeavor in an African country" (159).

Lassner's fourth chapter deals with the West Indies, focusing on the Dominican writer Phyllis Shande Allfrey and the British writer Phyllis Bottome, who spent a portion of her life on the island of Jamaica. Lassner's discussion of Allfrey explores her connection of the "disintegration of imperial power to the trajectory of war" (174) that began with World War I and would climax with World War II. Despite her love for Dominica, Allfrey's radical analyses cause her in the end to "implicat[e] her own activist travel plans in the island's imperial past and present" and to "confront the possibility that the idea of modern progress is itself a mythic construct that carries the dangers of obliterating the colonial subject." Lassner adds: "For the island's people, settlers and colonized alike, there is no postcolonial future without the recognition and affirmation of their contesting colonial identities and identifications with their colonial home" (175).

Bottome, who began her career in the 1920s and 30s as an engaged protestor against anti-Semitism, connected that concern with her desire for freedom and equality for blacks in Jamaica. Lassner notes that she "created a two-way bridge between the histories of World War II and worldwide imperialism by constructing a postimperial interracial romance" (189) in which a black Jamaican doctor in love with a white British headmistress explains the psychological damage that racist ideologies inflict on both the victims and the oppressors:

> People talk of a color bar, but what they mean, of course, is a psychological disgrace. Jews were less despised—in the countries where they are still despised—*before*—than *after*—six million of them were murdered for the sake of their inferiority. It was not, you see, so obvious that they *were* inferior until they were murdered. (187–88)

Lassner is at pains to distinguish their sympathetic bond with one another from the creation of a hybrid relationship, an argument that surfaced also in her first chapter, where she made clear her dislike of the postcolonial idea of hybridity when she argued that the heroine in Muriel Spark's

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novel could not choose her identity or forgo her identification with the Jews whose stories she heard in Israel. By refusing a happy—and leveling—hybridity, Lassner argues, Bottome creates instead a kind of duet between her characters that is a "harmonized dissonance" but not a

> negative force. In its recognition of the historically real Others of the Nazi death camps and of colonial oppression, it grants integrity to [the characters'] distinct if related experiences and events by refusing to construct any of these as a universalized, iconic narrative. (189)

In her conclusion, Lassner summarizes the ways in which all of the writers examined in her study (with the exception of Ethel Mannin) give voice to the Others as part of their attempt to understand and truly name the depredations perpetrated by empire. She ends with a discussion of Zadie Smith, the daughter of a Jamaican father and white British mother, whose *White Teeth* caused a sensation several years ago. Lassner pays particular attention to Smith's depiction of a moment in World War II when a white Briton refuses to kill a possible Nazi eugenicist because he is unable "to reduce another human being to an argument for killing him" (200). In doing so, he sets in motion the events that lead him to become friends with a Bangladeshi Muslim, events that also unleash the many voices and views that populate *White Teeth*. In its facing up to the tensions and traumas of the past through that wartime scene, Lassner says, *White Teeth* acts as an

> invitation to include those other white British women writers in Smith's celebration of the end of the Empire. They would be included among those whose lives were shaped by the experience of colonialism and recognized as writing back to their own colonial power base, to the colonized, to the postcolonial subject, and to the postcolonial critic. This inclusion then constructs new definitions of self and Other and margin and center. Instead of replicating the divisions of colonialism, they could be seen as repairing them. (201)

Which *Colonial Strangers* can also be seen as doing, with persuasive eloquence.

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Translating the Dreamers of China

Chinese Dreams: Pound, Brecht, *Tel Quel*
by Eric Hayot
Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004. 220 pages

Lucas Klein

Because Eric Hayot begins *Chinese Dreams* with a personal anecdote about how he came to study Chinese, I will break from standard book review format and tell some anecdotes of my own. I commuted to my first Chinese classes listening to Bob Dylan on my tape deck, and the line about Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot in "Desolation Row" prompted me to look up Pound's poetry. The coincidence of my interest in Chinese and Pound and Pound's interest in Chinese saw the beginning of my interest in translation and Chinese literature. A couple years earlier, I began my high school acting career with a small roll in Bertolt Brecht's *The Good Person of Szechwan,* and afterward I would joke that fate had cast me as Chinese onstage to prepare me for learning Chinese later on. But I also remember the director explaining the rudiments of the alienation effect and how Brecht used foreign China as a symbol for native Germany. Finally, between college and graduate school, I lived in Paris, a block away from the former residence of Zhou Enlai, but, aside from attending an exhibit at the Centre Pompidou called "Alors, la Chine," the *Tel Quel* milieu seldom touched me in any specifically notable way.

I indulge in chronicling my personal history because I imagine that all of us with a personal relationship to literature also have had similar run-ins with the forces that are Pound, Brecht, and *Tel Quel*. And while only prominence in twentieth-century Euro-American literary fields seems to unite them, Hayot compares their independent interactions with China. Of course, that prompts the question—which turns out to be the real question at stake in this study—*What is China?*

For Chinese people themselves, I have the impression that "what is China?" is no more complex than defining any other country from within. The changes exhibited in its history are well known, and periods of greatness or weakness flicker in their mental timelines. But the geo-political, cultural, and epistemological parameters hanging over people in

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China today trump any definition of the country based on the past (and this despite the impossibility of grammatically distinguishing between "what is China" and "what was China" in Chinese). So as Hayot's book attests, "what is China?" is mostly a question for us in the West, with our historical ignorance enabling fantasies of a diachronically monolithic China, while sheer size and politicoeconomic inaccessibility lead us to call it inscrutable even today.

As it turns out, the China with which Pound, Brecht, and the members of *Tèl Quel* engaged were three different Chinas, with Pound's ancient and abstract, Brecht's performative and alienating, and *Tèl Quel*'s contemporary and revolutionary. How actual China is large enough to accommodate all three sorts of dreams is a tension Hayot examines in his conclusion, but a mapping of each dream of, or relationship with, China is the subject of the individual chapters. Hayot's table of contents is essentially found in the book's subtitle, with one chapter each for Pound, Brecht, and *Tèl Quel*. And as their Chinas get progressively closer to the social and political present, the contents get progressively more complex (though my own scale of fading intimacy with the three subjects may also condition my response).

In the first chapter Hayot reads Pound by reading *Cathay,* examining how—and whether—anyone could conclude that it constitutes a primarily English or primarily Chinese product. Reading an array of secondary sources along with the primary texts, Hayot's questions are on the epistemological side of debates in translation theory: how is difference constituted when the act of translation relies on the precondition of sameness? The question could also be phrased the opposite way, as Hayot does when he writes:

> Pound was reminding his readers that the value in Li Po lay not in his Chineseness, but in his universality, in the fact that his poems revealed a shared history of ideas across time and space. And yet the mechanism by which this insight was revealed could not, in 1915, be separated from the fact of its Chineseness—it was as though something in the Chinese permitted, or gave birth to, the Poundian unveiling of the universal. (33)

The question grows even more complex when Hayot considers how *Cathay* was a translation in service of Pound's larger aesthetic project, imagism. The book's existence owes itself to a Chinese source and English

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readership very much at odds with each other (in such light, the stillness of the poems is at once remarkable and uneasy). But then, if Pound's dreams were only of ancient China, then part of those dreams was that he could inhabit China's present or, as Hayot writes, "Pound's disdain for China's state of affairs . . . appears to allow him to imagine himself (and the West) as the true inheritor of China's ideas" (46). Hayot concludes the chapter with a reference to Robert Kern's concept of "English-as-Chinese," in which the language of Pound's China can meld with the English context that required it.

Moving to Brecht, whose invention of China was on a smaller—though no less intricate—scale than Pound's, Hayot addresses Brecht's translations of Chinese poetry and then steps up to consider the alienation, or A-effect, that Brecht developed after watching a performance of Chinese opera. In dealing with the essay in which Brecht elaborated his drama of estrangement, "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting," however, Hayot is not only not dealing with translation as such, he is dealing with a question opposite from Pound's. That is, rather than calling into question the A-effect's Chineseness or Germanness, Brecht aims for the opposite, the nonfungible: "While acknowledging that the A-effect exists in Chinese theatre," Hayot writes, "Brecht does not want to mark it as fully Chinese; rather the effect has an unconnected development in Germany and China." And then,

> The claim that Chinese theatre techniques cannot be "exported" emphasizes the gap between German and Chinese uses of the A-effect; though they resemble one another, the Chinese technique cannot simply be carried into German theatre. (76)

And yet, to achieve this resistance to a Chinese entry into German identity, Brecht must position himself as having entered into a Chinese identity: "Brecht thus imagines a Chinese audience attuned to the A-effect in the same way that he is" (81). But such an imagining necessitates a denial of the very difference blocking simple transference between the Chinese and German contexts. Amidst such paradoxes, Hayot concludes his chapter with descriptions of performances of *The Good Person of Szechwan,* understood as another example of the referential tension inherent in any Westerner's depiction of China: "no matter how much one tries to hide the Chineseness of the play, it remains imbricated in the stagework,

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not as a reflection of actual historical China but as a representation of a particular European 'China'" (99).

Because Hayot moves from individuals to a group, because he shifts from the modernist to the postmodernist, and because their dreams involved actual encounters with contemporary political China, the chapter on *Tel Quel* is longer and even more troubled than either of the earlier chapters. Hayot alludes to this fact himself, saying that because *Tel Quel*'s writings on China were understood as being writings on a text, "they undid the major premise of the question that haunts criticism of Pound's *Cathay*—Chinese or English product?—by insisting on the inseparability of a culturally imagined version of 'China' from a real one" (123–24). The issue of ideology is also a sore spot, for while we might be able to psychologize Pound's fascism and sympathize with Brecht's Marxism (as well as avoid them, for they do not impinge on their relationships with China), *Tel Quel*'s Maoism was both central to their involvement with China as well as more likely to embarrass the academics and *littérateurs* who admire Barthes and Kristeva. Hayot does not shy away with embarrassment, though; rather, he lists the "facts about 'China' as it appeared to *Tel Quel,*" which are the crux of his chapter:

> (1) Its language uniquely combined signifier and referent; (2) its poetry articulated the universal and long-repressed (in the West) problem of symbolization; (3) its Maoism offered the hope of a truly cultural revolution. Each of these facts resembles the others, in that they all promise the disruption of vitally important and similar Western oppositions: text/reality, repression/consciousness, culture/politics. *Tel quel*'s China essentially works the same way. (128)

And yet, the very possibility of *Tel Quel*'s China relies on another binary, never disrupted: East/West. In part, this is because *Tel Quel* had "a general sense of the specificity of individual cultures and the difference between China and Europe" (128), but Hayot's task is to destabilize such an opposition. Psychological projection is one of the steps, but more weight is put on the writings of Marcelin Pleynet, who distanced himself from *Tel Quel*'s Maoism even as he wrote his diaries traveling through Cultural Revolution China. "Pleynet's Chinese experiences, as managed by the Communist Party," Hayot explains, "gave him the sense that he was never really seeing genuine China—in either its classical or folkloric ver-

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sions—but instead a trumped-up and aesthetically vacuous melodrama" (147). Here we are confronted with Maoist China's own Chinese dreams, which manifest themselves with a fully Brechtian alienating effect. In the end, Hayot is as exacting as he is paradoxical: *Tèl Quel*'s "trip to China occurred largely so that it could reveal, at the far end of its history, its own ontological impossibility" (175).

Eric Hayot's *Chinese Dreams* presents a swarm of conflicting ideas folded into three tight chapters. Each of these topics could constitute its own book-length study, but the juxtaposition of each against the others throws the phenomenon of China into clarifying relief. The China imagined, envisioned, or dreamt by each of these literary entities is, as noted above, different and distinct but somehow remains intact. China, both as country and as signifier, exists as a receptacle for Western imagination even as its geopolitical entity pushes against being defined by others' notions.

Pound, Brecht, and *Tèl Quel* loom as giants in the literary world partly because of the brilliance and complexity of their oeuvres but also because they draw forth associations from their readership. When those associations turn toward China, they demonstrate an array of projections each of us, particularly those involved in studying China, must confront if we are better to understand our own impulses and contradictions. Hayot's book succeeds as a fascinating examination, then, not only of Pound, Brecht, and *Tèl Quel,* but also of us, the dreamers of China with a serious and personal relationship to literature.

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>
> —Wayne Koestenbaum

Virginia Woolf famously accused Arnold Bennett of caring more about the mundane houses characters live in than about those characters themselves, neglecting the interior defining qualities of characters in favor of superficial descriptions that reveal too little. "He is trying to make us imagine for him," she tells us in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" (1924), "He is trying to hypnotize us into the belief that, because he has made a house, there must be a person living there" (328-29). Bennett's fascination with the hotel space, in life and in art, would seem to support this claim. In *Those United States* (1912), a collection of essays detailing his first transatlantic voyage, Bennett confesses "[his] secret ambition had always been to be the manager of a grand hotel" (149-50), though this ambition was hardly as secret as Bennett suggests. Two of his most popular novels, *The Grand Babylon Hotel* (1902) and *Imperial Palace* (1930), feature hotels based on London's Savoy as the setting for nearly all of their action. A number of his other novels and short stories—notably *The Old Wives' Tale* (1908), his masterwork—similarly take place in and around hotels.[1] Yet in these works, Bennett enthusiastically reconceives accepted notions of home and domestic life, resituating his characters within the parameters of the hotel, and thus creating new kinds of characters, representing in new ways individual subjectivity and its relation to material space as he explores the modern hotel in all its various incarnations. In doing so, Bennett addresses the very questions he is accused by Woolf of avoiding, illuminating the deeply complicated relationship between internal and external conditions, between domestic selves and public identities.

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Chronologically situated between Victorianism and high modernism, Bennett closely examines the transition of his characters from the one period to the other, and thus focuses, in the most pragmatic sense, on the question of where they live, how they define and are defined by the rooms they occupy. Where Woolf sees this as banal materialism, we might recognize Bennett's acute realization that the houses of the nineteenth century—and the identities they shape—were becoming obsolete, and something needed to replace them. While Woolf accuses Bennett's characters of "deserting even the well-built villa in the Five Towns" for "an eternity of bliss spent in the very best hotel in Brighton" ("Modern" 148)—leaving a dull though solid grounding for an existence wholly trivial—she ignores the very real significance of such relocation as Bennett represents it. As brilliantly as modern authors might explore inner psychological worlds, the physical realities of characters' lives remained important, the inner worlds and the outer realities shaping one another in a variety of ways. Domestic life might change radically—as it does, time and again, in Bennett's works—but it remains crucial to character.

Bennett's two explicit "hotel novels" were written at opposite ends of his career. *Imperial Palace* was Bennett's last completed novel and is a far lengthier and more ponderous work. Each book focuses on the operations of a London luxury hotel (modeled on the Savoy) and each is deeply invested in the question of Englishness, signaling Bennett's concerns with larger issues of nation and identity. The Grand Babylon Hotel is filled almost entirely with non-English characters, while within its walls the Imperial Palace offers a miniature reproduction of England—specifically of its class system. Even more urgently, perhaps, these novels are concerned with the desire to find or create a home in the modern world, and how the hotel, seemingly at odds with such desire, becomes the means by which a new model of domesticity can be identified.

Modernism has traditionally been defined by its rejection of Victorian notions of the domestic, a breaking away from home and family, and from all the network of connections and loyalties that such material conditions and relationships entail. Of course, this is a position that has been challenged on a number of fronts in recent years. Critics such as Victoria Rosner and Christopher Reed have focused on the importance of interior design (it defining the home as artistic workshop and as itself a work of art) to the modernist project, while Davida Pines finds modernism more traditional in its insistence on the domestic roles assumed

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by men and women than is often recognized. Such approaches, however, accept Victorian definitions of domesticity, looking for evidence of its persistence in modern lives. Bennett goes further—articulating new modes of domestic life, following his characters as they not only adapt but reformulate their ways of being in the world. The hotel spaces of Bennett's novels—and of early twentieth-century novels more generally—suggest, that is, a new understanding of domestic relations, and of community and nation, one not attached to specific geographical locations, but crystallizing spontaneously yet definitively, within the hotel space.

Bennett was far from alone in his infatuation with hotels. It is reflective of a fascination on the part of modern authors of all stripes and nationalities with the narrative opportunities afforded by the hotel setting. Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and E. M. Forster, and other British modernists, were taken with hotels, as were their American counterparts—writers like Henry James, a self-proclaimed "hotel child," Sinclair Lewis, and Edith Wharton—and Continental writers such as Marcel Proust, Thomas Mann, and Joseph Roth. Indeed, the list goes on and on, until one appears to be studying not an isolated phenomenon, but modern literature—or modern life—itself. To a degree, this reflects the increased ease of travel, both domestic and international, leading to rapid growth in the hotel industry during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[2] Many authors spent significant periods of time in hotels, developing an interest in them that extended to their writing. Questions of identity and transience, central for so many modern writers, are, moreover, naturally underscored in hotels, places where, by definition, one stays only temporarily in an impersonal domestic space—neither wholly public nor wholly private—largely ignorant of and unknown to others.

Thus, if Bennett's accessible and popular work made him an outcast among his difficult and abstruse modernist contemporaries, his love of hotels did not. Virginia Woolf's first novel, *The Voyage Out* (1915), begins onboard a ship (a sort of hotel in its own right) from England to South America, then takes place primarily in and around the main hotel of tourist Santa Marina, where young Rachel Vinrace is initiated into a society unlike any she has known in her sheltered life with her father. This hotel is very different from the London establishment where Peter Walsh will take up occupancy in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1924), and the reasons for this speak to Woolf's own anxieties about modern life. The "Sirens" episode of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) takes place in the Ormond hotel restaurant and bar,

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while the Dubliners of his short stories wander the boarding houses and temporary residences of their city; the climactic moments of "The Dead," the most prominent of these stories, occur in the hotel room where Gabriel Conroy, struck with a truth about his marriage, begins to negotiate a more complex understanding of both his domestic existence and his personal identity. Lucy Honeychurch meets her future husband George Emerson in the Italian pension where E. M. Forster's *A Room With a View* (1908) both begins and ends, the rules of hotel engagements (in all senses of the word) essentially structuring the novel's plot. And in *Howards End* (1910), Helen Schlegel and Leonard Bast spend a fateful night in an English hotel, leading to Leonard's final ruin but also to the production of the heir of Howards End—and to the birth of the new version of English life the novel heralds and celebrates.

With a few key exceptions, literary critics have nevertheless paid little attention to modernist hotels. In one such exception, Bettina Matthias's relatively recent book on hotels in early twentieth-century Austrian and German literature marks the literary hotel as a place of danger and uncertainty, as well as of opportunity: "Hotel rooms are rented spaces to which we are not the only ones who have a key. They are filled with objects and furniture that an indiscriminate number of people have used and will use, that we neither bought nor chose, placed in a room that says nothing about us" (41). In another, Charlotte Bates wrestles with Paul Fussell's declaration that the imaginative life of the 1930s was characterized by "hotel-consciousness": "The interest provoked by the hotel during this period is unprecedented—and unexplained," she suggests (63), concluding that "the hotel . . . constitutes a certain milieu which renders it an apt setting for representations of the modern restless mind" (71). Yet, by and large, the field is limited to brief studies of individual authors or works and their relation to a given hotel or hotels, independent of any larger consideration of the significance of the hotel as an entity in its own right.[3]

Cultural critics have shown more interest in hotels. Overwhelmingly, however, they view these spaces only as a symptom of the restlessness and isolation of modern or postmodern life. Marc Augé has classed the hotel as an example of what he terms the "non-places" that are constitutive of contemporary life: "If a place can be defined as relational, historical, and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place" (77-78). Fredric Jameson famously reads the Westin Bonaventure as a

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postmodern space, which its occupants are not and cannot be prepared to navigate:

> I am proposing the notion that we are here in the presence of something like a mutation in built space itself. My implication is that we ourselves, the human subjects who happen into this new space, have not kept pace with that evolution; there has been a mutation in the object unaccompanied as yet by any equivalent mutation in the subject. We do not yet possess the perceptual equipment to match this new hyperspace. (38)

Invoking Lévi-Strauss's words, James Clifford describes the hotel as "a place of transit, not of residence" and as "somewhere you pass through, where the encounters are fleeting, arbitrary" (Clifford 17), while Wayne Koestenbaum finds in the hotel both freedom from the routine life and thought to which it stands in contrast and a deep nostalgia for the family home it evokes through imitation as well as through acknowledged difference.[4] The disjunction between such characterizations and the often attractive and reassuring representations of hotels in the novels of the first half of the twentieth century partly reflect their historical periods. Augé and Jameson in particular are concerned mainly with later, post-modern incarnations of the hotel, which have, in their view, lost whatever personal quality that may have inhered in earlier establishments. But although these relatively recent accounts focus on hotel phenomena contemporary with themselves, they have nonetheless inflected the few literary-critical readings we do have of the very different sorts of hotels in earlier twentieth-century texts.

As spaces of modern consumerism, as potent symbols of the new, and as imaginative sites of self-creation and re-creation, hotels nevertheless serve key and as yet largely unrecognized roles in modern literature. As they sacrifice the security of more fixed abodes, literary hotel guests remake their domestic lives and reconceive their own identities, and hotel owners and employees adopt authorial roles as they attempt to make sense of these new narratives. In representing both sets of characters, modern authors come at questions about domestic life—and its various implications—from unexpected angles. Most strikingly, however, modernist literary hotels are, by and large, not unwelcoming spaces, but places of community and connection, complex and vexed sites of the literary dimensions of modernism and its uneven development, its historical tra-

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jectory, and its various aesthetic permutations and political consequences. They are *not* places of isolation, but overwhelmingly—often unexpectedly—positive and productive spaces, emblems of a largely unremarked conception of modern domesticity, and of a new understanding of home and personal relations in the modern world.

As opposed to the alienating spaces described by cultural critics, then, hotels emerge time and again in Bennett's writing, not as places of anxiety or despair, but of excitement and discovery. While acknowledging the specter of the postmodern hotel, its residents, owners, managers, and employees don't lose their identities in these spaces, or spend themselves in mourning the loss of more permanent or traditional homes. Their hotels are welcoming locations, inviting both characters and reader to discover a modern existence, with all of the potential and uncertainty that modernity brings with it. At the same time community and self are preserved, and domesticity survives the physical removal from the Victorian family home—and is reinvented in innovative and often unexpected ways.

The Grand Babylon Hotel

The real Savoy Hotel features an "Omelette Arnold Bennett" on the menu of its main restaurant, The Savoy Grill. For about £10, London diners can partake of this signature concoction of eggs, smoked haddock, heavy cream, and cheese, which legend declares Bennett ate while staying in the luxury accommodations. It stands as a reminder of the deep-seated connection between Bennett and hotel life, in and beyond his work. Indeed, the premier "hotel author" of his day, Bennett explored the literary hotel space with a patience and fascination unmatched by his contemporaries.

The Grand Babylon Hotel features numerous individuals of different nationalities coming together in social, professional, and romantic contexts. While the hotel's name might suggest a site of chaos where participants can't communicate or work together toward a common goal, the actuality is just the opposite. At its core, the novel plays with the idea of difference, acknowledging the various possibilities that emerge as questions of identity are seemingly destabilized, and the confusion of identity categories the hotel prompts is seen as a boon rather than a difficulty. A source of such destabilization emerges early in the book, as Theodore Racksole, a New York railroad millionaire, "the third richest man in the

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United States, and therefore probably in the world" (*Grand* 5-6), decides on the spur of the moment to buy the Grand Babylon Hotel—the most famous and renowned such establishment in London—both for control over the hotel service, and for a sense of security in his new English lodgings. Admitting to "anxieties" that he is trying to distract himself from through his holiday activities, the millionaire is warned at the time of sale by the hotel's eponymous owner, Félix Babylon, of the dangers he faces in his new role as proprietor. According to Babylon, rather than the straightforward business affair Racksole imagines it to be, the hotel is of necessity a site of subterfuge and questionable acts. The Grand Babylon has a life of its own, Félix insists, to which he as manager does not have—and must not have—access:

> Do you not perceive that the roof which habitually shelters all the force, all the authority of the world, must necessarily also shelter nameless and numberless plotters, schemers, evil-doers, and workers of mischief? The thing is as clear as day—and as dark as night. Mr. Racksole, I never know by whom I am surrounded. I never know what is going forward. Only sometimes I get hints, glimpses of strange acts and strange secrets. You mentioned my servants. They are almost all good servants, skilled, competent. But what are they besides? For anything I know my fourth sub-chef may be an agent of some European Government. For anything I know my valuable Miss Spencer may be in the pay of a court dressmaker or a Frankfort banker. Even Rocco may be someone else in addition to Rocco. (24-5)

To draw a comparison Bennett himself practically proposes, a hotel is like a late nineteenth-century novel: large, complex, multi-layered, with many characters important and minor, and numerous simultaneous plots afoot. Placing modern characters in this setting offers a natural transition from the kind of nineteenth-century novel that attempts to take in an entire society to one more focused on the individual. Bringing together people from many different nations and classes, the hotel highlights their individual stories while making evident that their temporary cohabitation and interactions form not a microcosm of the larger society, but a world apart—in which unique, flexible, but very real rules apply.

As it happens, Babylon is not far off in his speculations; the very employees he names are key players in the criminal activity that structures

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the novel's plot. Declining to investigate the "glimpses of strange acts and strange secrets" (*Grand* 24) of which he has "hints" makes him complicit in a kidnapping, a murder, and an international plot against a foreign government, all of which occur under the auspices of his hotel and might have been prevented by him with due vigilance. Babylon's point, however, is that his hotel cannot be read like a Victorian triple-decker: the plots won't resolve or even come to light; the characters won't reveal themselves willingly or at all. If he, in a sense, occupies an authorial role, he is far from omniscient, attending to the surface of things, rather than invading the privacy of his employees and thus delving into unpleasantries. In his judgment, he thus maintains the flexibility and autonomy that allow his hotel to operate. Yet Babylon rightly surmises that the hotel's new owner will find himself decidedly less tranquil in the face of this complex reality.

For Theodore Racksole has come to England with the idea of taking root, believing that he can find stability in his father's native land, simply by "build[ing] a house in Park Lane" and "buy[ing] some immemorial country seat with a history as long as the A. T. and S. railroad" (*Grand* 49). The son of an Oxford bed-maker who went on to accumulate a fortune in Pittsburgh steel, Racksole romanticizes England as the place where truth and history reside, and imagines his entry into English life will solidify his identity, rather than confront him with the need for self-definition. Of course, the instability of turn-of-the-century America has led Racksole to overestimate the legibility and coherence of an England on the cusp of modernity.

> My father took the wise precaution of having me educated in England. I had my 3 years at Oxford, like any son of the upper middle class! It did me good. It has been worth more to me than many successful speculations. It taught me that the English language is different from and better than the American language, and that there is something—I haven't yet found out exactly what—in English life that Americans will never get. Why, he added, in the U.S. we still bribe our judges and our newspapers. And we talk of the 18th Century as though it was the beginning of the world. (48)

Convinced that national identity is a fixed quality, Racksole is certain that his English background and education will set him on a clear path to a traditional aristocratic English life. However, the larger confusion over the meaning of such national identity is underscored by his own inde-

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terminate one. If it is Racksole's very Americanness that has propelled his wealth, it is also what fuels his romantic notion of an idyllic England, free from the crass profiteering he associates with the United States. Yet in the course of his adventures at the Grand Babylon, Racksole finds that the England he imagined does not exist—and is not worth pursuing. Indeed, the world of the hotel reveals to him a world of international intrigue and foreign encounters.

While it may be synonymous with England in the minds of its guests, almost no one in the famous London hotel Racksole purchases, is English. The Grand Babylon's success is built upon its attracting European dignitaries, who have befriended its owner and made a home for themselves within its walls:

> The Grand Babylon counted that day wasted on which it did not entertain, at the lowest, a German prince or the Maharajah of some Indian State. When Félix Babylon—after whom, and not with any reference to London's nickname, the hotel was christened—when Félix Babylon founded the hotel in 1869 he had set himself to cater for Royalty, and that was the secret of his triumphant eminence. The son of a rich Swiss hotel proprietor and financier, he had contrived to establish a connection with the officials of several European Courts, and he had not spared money in that respect. Sundry kings and not a few princesses called him Félix, and spoke familiarly of the hotel as "Félix's"; and Félix had found that this was very good for trade. (7)

The Swiss hotelier is thus only one of many foreign presences in the novel. The Racksoles are American; the royals at the center of the novel's activity are from the tiny German province of Posen, and are being victimized by rival Bosnians; their would-be financier is a Jew. The staff is even more multifarious than the guests. Several of them, for portions of the book, even disguise their national identities. Rocco, the heavily-accented Italian chef, is actually an American. Miss Spencer, the hotel's secretary, disappears only to revisit the hotel disguised as an elderly Eastern-European baroness, her true background (is she English? married to Jules?) remaining hidden. Prince Aribert is immediately identified by Nella as the "plain Count Steebock" she met in Paris the previous spring, "doubtless travelling incognito" (44). Though he is masquerading as a Frenchman, Jules, the head-waiter and ringleader of the criminal activ-

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ity, may well be the only "true" Englishman (a native of Hertfordshire, whose real name, he tells Racksole, is Tom Jackson) within the confines of the hotel. Finally, the Grand Babylon is neither English nor foreign; the multiple identities of its guests and staff, and their multiple deceptions, undermine the stable meaning of each of these terms.

Although the threat of the foreign hangs over *The Grand Babylon Hotel*, in the end it is the closed, nationalist idea of England held initially by Racksole that is the real threat. There is no home for the Racksoles here, not if they stick to their original plan, and so they adapt. In the engagement of Prince Aribert and Nella that concludes the novel, Bennett refuses isolationism or xenophobia, and individual characters take each other largely on trust. Aribert will give up his royal status to marry Nella; Racksole will bestow half his fortune on his daughter. The domestic future in search of which Racksole has come to London will emerge not from the now quaint-seeming acquisitions of property he imagined at the novel's outset, but from his daughter's marriage to a penniless German prince who has abdicated his title—the agreement formalized in a hotel. Finally, *The Grand Babylon Hotel* welcomes such cultural mixture.

The hotel is not a permanent residence. Figuratively if not literally the Racksoles have been the guests of Félix Babylon, who returns to reclaim his hotel just as their own adventures come to an end. But the Racksoles have learned from the Grand Babylon to understand domestic life in a new way, and it seems plain that they will not follow the trajectory upon which they began—to purchase a quiet country home and settle into English life. And of course, Nella's marriage will necessitate her own decisions about where and how to live. What Bennett offers here is a model for establishing a domestic life in a world where permanence is perhaps all but extinct. The Racksoles move into the Grand Babylon, become fully invested in it, and then leave, moving on to another chapter, their departure reflecting not upon the quality of the hotel, but upon the reality of modern life. Modern domesticity requires a degree of mobility incompatible with permanent settlement—and is built not all at once, but progressively, in increments, as individuals move from place to place, taking pieces of each temporary residence along with them.

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The Imperial Palace standard

In his well-known essay on the hotel lobby, Siegfried Kracauer characterizes it as the antithesis of the physical interior of the church—"the inverted image of the house of God"—and marks the hotel manager as an empty God-figure, invisibly overseeing the trivial affairs of the hotel space:

> In both places people appear there as guests. But whereas the house of God is dedicated to the service of the one whom people have gone there to encounter, the hotel lobby accommodates all who go there to meet no one. It is . . . a space that encompasses them and has no function other than to encompass them. The impersonal nothing represented by the hotel manager here occupies the position of the unknown one in whose name the church congregation gathers. (175-76)

A very different vision is embodied in the *Imperial Palace*'s Evelyn Orcham, who succeeds, perhaps at too great a cost, in seeing meaning and purpose in the management of his hotel.[5] Orcham believes it to be both possible and necessary that he know everything about the Imperial Palace, including the staff or guests. He is disturbed at the prospect of the transfer of the hotel's ownership to businessman Sir Henry Savott, who wants to replicate the success of the Imperial Palace by creating a conglomerate of similar hotels. Though his job is never in question, Orcham is skeptical about the idea of a chain of Imperial Palaces, partly because he dislikes the idea of mass-marketing the hotel in which he takes such individual pride, but also because he could not maintain constant presence at—and control over—multiple hotels.[6]

The Imperial Palace is Evelyn's residence as well as his place of business. He is deeply identified with it and uncertain what would happen to that identity should the hotel cease to be a singular operation under his direction. Defined less by his Englishness, or his class than his profession, Orcham feels himself on common ground only with those who are equally entrenched in the physical life of the hotel.

In his devotion to his hotel, part of Orcham's aim is to create a home for himself. While the Grand Babylon opens itself to the all comers, the Imperial Palace looks to draw its circle closer, creating a domestic oasis of homely comforts (and first-class luxury) for those inside, as it seeks to isolate itself from the unpredictability of the outside world. In this way, they offer two competing models of cosmopolitanism—the one embrac-

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ing the unrestricted coming together of various people and experiences, the other working to contain and domesticate such encounters. Yet both represent the search for a secure domestic life that can be sustained in a modern world.

That Orcham has transformed the hotel into a domestic space not only for those who visit but for himself and his employees as well, is suggested by his two romantic relationships. He first becomes entangled with Henry Savott's daughter, Gracie. Orcham believes their affair will lead to marriage, but Gracie breaks it off when she realizes that her lover will never be able to devote himself entirely to her, so committed is he to his hotel. Briefly disappointed, Orcham soon realizes he is temperamentally much better suited to Violet Powler, the head housekeeper of the Imperial Palace, whose rise from the hotel laundry he has engineered. Unlike Babylon, who wishes to allow his hotel complete autonomy, disowning the activity that takes place within its walls, or Racksole, who wishes to decode the mystery of the Grand Babylon, Orcham wants to domesticate the variety of experiences that the Imperial Palace houses, rendering the zoo-like collection of exotic guests homely and non-threatening. Its employees are not the reckless outlaws of the Grand Babylon, but committed laborers with physically demanding, often unrewarding jobs, whose individual identities are subsumed in the hotel—and who welcome this process. Obedient and deferential in her work, Violet Powler is more at home in the Imperial Palace than her parents' flat, which she visits dutifully on Sundays, briefly leaving the hotel room that is her primary residence:

> As for Violet, this excursion into South London—she had made several before—was the first to awaken her fully to the quick growth of her affection for the Palace. As she journeyed eastward in the tram she was positively impatient to be back on the Floors with all their endless small surprises and anxieties; quite ready to be immersed again in a sea of trouble—what some people would call trouble but she wouldn't. (313)

The couple's engagement closes the novel on what might seem a happy note, though it is also an unsettling one. Violet lacks the glamour or charm of Gracie, one of Bennett's most appealing characters—and is a great challenge to Orcham's traditional ideas about gender roles and romantic relationships. The insularity of the Imperial Palace seems strangely

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unmitigated by the compromise that Orcham ultimately reaches with Savott and the company's board (or by his decidedly practical marriage). Indeed, it appears that his own stewardship of the hotel will go on more or less unchallenged, and that the domesticity that he will create within the Imperial Palace will look disappointingly conventional.

If there is something disturbing about the domesticity of the Imperial Palace, perhaps it is because it seems to so strongly imitate an earlier version of the domestic that was becoming outmoded. While Orcham finds a wife and settles comfortably into domestic life at his hotel, it is by no means clear that the more attractive option would not have been to take his chances with Gracie Savott. Orcham does not appear to value the sort of worldiness that attracts men like Theodore Racksole or Félix Babylon to hotel life. Rather, for him the hotel represents an opportunity to shut out the larger world.

Towards hotel life

Bennett's most well-known and critically admired novel, *The Old Wives' Tale* narrates the lives of sisters Constance and Sophia Baines. While Constance remains for her entire life at their childhood home in Bursley, a town in the industrial regions of northern England referred to by Bennett as "The Five Towns," Sophia leaves at the first opportunity, and becomes, by turns, hotel keeper, owner, and guest. A confused and self-doubting heroine, Sophia embodies Bennett's search for a new model of domesticity—built not on female dependence or stagnation, but on dynamism. Neither the outwardly developed but inwardly hollow character decried by Woolf, nor the morally and sexually ambiguous figure so often associated with hotels (as in Woolf's own *The Voyage Out*), she is a pragmatic, though decidedly idiosyncratic, individual moving steadily from a late nineteenth-century world of, to her, unsatisfactorily domestic possibilities, to a twentieth century in which she may reconceive rather than replicate such lives. Her hotel life begins with her youthful flight to the Hatfield—a "respectable" London hotel, where she plans to elope with traveling salesman Gerald Scales. At this early point, Sophia, who has run away from her home and family, is still innocent of hotel life, and her "flashing youth" is set in contrast to the "patched and senile drabness of the bedroom" with its "disturbing sensation of dirt everywhere concealing itself" (257). From this point forward, the couple's relationship takes place almost entirely in hotels, as they have no fixed home, largely because, as

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becomes clear, Gerald does not really want such a permanent domestic space, preferring to let life take its course and to drift from one location to another until the funds run out. Sophia, on the other hand, seeks a more stable domesticity, with the sense of at-homeness provided by her Bursley life, though not its homebound oppressiveness.

After a brief stay in Paris, the couple travels to Auxerre, as Gerald is eager to watch a public execution scheduled to take place there. Gerald promptly leaves Sophia alone in the ghastly Hotel de Vézelay, while he goes off to enjoy the festivities. As she watches the procession of the prisoner and the frenzy of the crowd from her hotel room window, Sophia has her first real insight into her own condition—a new bride with an unreliable husband, alone in a foreign country, having severed all ties with her family and community—and draws a parallel between herself and the condemned man:

> Sophia waited, horror-struck. She saw nothing but the gleaming triangle of metal that was suspended high above the prone, attendant victim. She felt like a lost soul, torn too soon from shelter, and exposed forever to the worst hazards of destiny. Why was she in this strange, incomprehensible town, foreign and inimical to her, watching with agonized glance this cruel obscene spectacle? Her sensibilities were all a bleeding mass of wounds. Why? Only yesterday, and she had been an innocent, timid creature in Bursley, in Axe, a foolish creature who deemed the concealment of letters a supreme excitement. Either that day or this day was not real. Why was she imprisoned alone in that odious, indescribably odious hotel, with no one to soothe and comfort her, and carry her away? (314)

Sophia's horror is partly a reaction to the execution—and partly a realization that she has married a man who would take her to such a place on her honeymoon and then leave her to her own devices. The Hotel de Vézelay is by far the most terrifying of the hotels Bennett presents in his novels. Lacking even the veneer of culture or hospitality, it houses the mob mentality of the voyeuristic crowd gathered to see the spectacle that has drawn them to the town. Yet it is in her brief stay at this hotel that Sophia realizes that Bursley is no longer her home and that Gerald will not be able to create a new home for her. Instead, she must learn to think of herself and her life in less absolute terms.

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Her identification with the prisoner indicates both Sophia's feelings of vulnerability in her situation, and the sacrifice of herself that she is preparing to make. As they suffer for their respective crimes, both she and the "prone, attendant victim" take on Christlike qualities ("Her sensibilities were all a bleeding mass of wounds"). Sophia's terror here will be replaced later by marked self-sufficiency, as she builds a thriving hotel business without experience, training, or financial support from others, but it is in this brief interlude at the Hotel de Vézelay that Sophia understands what it means to attempt to establish identity, beyond her material conditions, and accepts that challenge.

Unlike some of Bennett's other characters, Sophia lacks the freedom of movement or the financial independence that might allow her to take her situation in stride. Another Bursley native, Edward Henry ("Denry"), the hero of both *The Card* and *The Regent*, offers a strong contrast here. In *The Regent,* he is drawn from Bursley by the excitement of London—and builds his life there with Wilkins's, the most exclusive hotel in the city, as his base. But while Edward Henry can move back and forth with ease between Bursley and London (leaving his wife, mother, and three children behind on his trips to the city), Sophia has no such luxury. Secure in his own identity, Edwin Henry is free to play with it in the space of London's hotels and to experiment with ideas of himself and the spaces that suit him, as he works, more or less on a whim, to build the Regent Theatre. He only, briefly, brings his two lives together when he fears becoming romantically involved with the actress Elsie April, employing his wife and family as a safeguard, though still keeping them separate from his London existence. For Sophia the stakes of leaving Bursley are much higher. She leaves her childhood home with no thought that she could or might come back. There is no part of her endeavor that is not marked by the realization that success is necessary not merely to avoid embarrassment, but to survive.

Sophia and Gerald's squandering of Gerald's inheritance is traced in their movement from the resort hotels of France to cheap, run-down rooms—and ultimately, for Sophia, to a convalescence at Madame Foucault's, after Gerald, finally broke, abandons her. This dubious establishment, where rooms are rented no questions asked reveals the underside of the hotel business, where prostitution, illicit sex, and other criminal activities thrive. It is here that Sophia first finds herself serving as *de facto* manager of room rentals and guests, and begins her transition from

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customer to proprietor of a hotel establishment. While she has rejected the dreariness of the domestic life in Bursley chosen by her sister, and abandoned hopes of resuscitating her ill-fated marriage, Sophia, housing men whose wives have been sent out of Paris while the city is under siege, finds herself acting in the capacity of wife and homemaker to these "siege widowers." The men who find themselves in Sophia's care are grateful for her meticulous attention to their needs and idealize Sophia and their own domestic situation:

> The four men appreciated their paradise. In them developed that agreeable feeling of security which solitary males find only under the roof of a landlady who is at once prompt, honest, and a votary of cleanliness. . . .Quite naturally they came to regard her as the paragon and miracle of women. They endowed her with every fine quality. According to them there had never been such a woman in the history of mankind; there could not have been! . . .In short, Sophia was perfect for them, an impossible woman. Whatever she did was right. (379)

As hotel matron, Sophia does much of the same work that would be required of her as a wife or mother, but in a professional, rather than a familial context.[7] She refuses the requests of these boarders only when they take the form of sexual propositions, which she firmly, but professionally, declines. In choosing to run such an establishment, and avoiding social or romantic engagement with those around her, Sophia attempts to close herself from scrutiny, and to limit her curiosity about those she serves to the basic external facts she needs to confidently rent her rooms.

Her self-containment becomes even more apparent when Sophia decides to buy a small pension, previously run by an English couple who have failed to manage their finances properly and must abandon the business. She purchases the Pension Frensham and runs it with marked success for over three decades:

> Sophia's sole interest was in her profits. The excellence of her house was firmly established. . . .Often she had to refuse guests. She naturally did so with a certain distant condescension. Her manner to guests increased in stiff formality; and she was excessively firm with undesirables. . . .She was a landlady. She was *the* landlady: efficient, stylish, diplomatic, and tremendously expe-

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> rienced. There was no trickery, no baseness of Parisian life that she was not acquainted with. She could not be startled and she could not be swindled. (412-13)

Sophia steps into a role previously occupied by the original Mrs. Frensham, but her guests do not register a distinction:

> She was known as Mrs. Frensham. Across the balconies of two windows the Frenshams had left a guilded sign, "Pension Frensham," and Sophia had not removed it. She often explained that her name was not Frensham; but in vain. Every visitor inevitably and persistently addressed her according to the sign. It was past the general comprehension that the proprietress of the Pension Frensham might bear another name than Frensham. (412)

Sophia's seamlessly occupying the roles of Parisian hotel manager and "Mrs. Frensham" illuminates both identity's mutability and its fixed nature—which remains wholly untarnished by any inauthenticity in the life she has chosen. More regular guests take pride in knowing Sophia's "real" name, one of them (Mr. Mardon, who will ultimately purchase the hotel) causing Sophia to be identified by Matthew Peel-Swynnerton, a Bursley native, who happens to be staying at the pension. Matthew recognizes Sophia's married name of "Scales" from local Bursley legend, and is genuinely taken aback at the magnitude of his discovery. "'Well, well!' he thought. 'Of all the queer things—!' At last he had encountered something *really* strange in the spectacle of existence. It had fallen to him to discover the legendary woman who had fled from Bursley before he was born, and of whom nobody knew anything" (427). But while it is easy to understand his realization seems momentous to the young man, aside from her physical location within Paris and her profession, Peel-Swynnerton has discovered nothing about Sophia, who has steadfastly concealed her inner life from those around her, as she has built up psychological as well as financial reserves.

In casting herself as hotel manager, Sophia assumes the authorial role, separating herself from the other characters, who she sees as interchangeable.

> What struck Sophia was the astounding similarity of her guests. They all asked the same questions, made the same exclamations, went out on the same excursions, returned with the same judge-

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> ments, and exhibited the same unimpaired assurance that foreigners were really very peculiar people. They never seemed to advance in knowledge. There was a constant stream of explorers from England who had to be set on their way to the Louvre or the Bon Marché. (412)

This interchangeability renders irrelevant to Sophia the question of how much can be known about the guests. In this regard, she is quite different from the hotel managers in Bennett's other novels, who similarly recognize the need to respect their customers' privacy, but do so *because* they recognize their individuality. This difference reflects the fact that Sophia is female, needs to support herself, and, because of her experiences, is extremely defensive, whereas Bennett's other hoteliers are male, wealthy, and love hotels for their own sake. Sophia runs her business successfully, but this life in which she believes herself to be permanently fixed, is, in the end, quite easily disposed of, sold to the dubious Mr. Mardon.

The final hotel in the novel is the Rutland, the Buxton hotel that Sophia and Constance visit while the Bursley home is temporarily without a servant. While Constance is uneasy here and anxious to return home, Sophia is at ease, though humbled to realize that it is finer than her own hotel, and that she is not the worldly woman she has imagined herself to be, but in fact has been in "a groove as deep as Constance's" (*Old* 502) for thirty years. Bennett's point is not only that the distinction between the women is extreme, but that it can be attributed neither simply to life experience nor to personal bent alone. The hotel neither shapes nor conceals identities, but merely provides a space for their expression.

The Rutland is far from a perfect solution to the loss of the Baines' home—which has been slipping away gradually, first as the druggist Critchlow takes over the half of the house in which the Baines had run a tailoring shop, and finally as the Midland Clothiers Company declines to renew Constance's lease. While Sophia can accept life in the Rutland, acknowledging, as she does, that she made mistakes in leaving her home and family so lightly, but finding that hotel life, for better or worse, suits her, Constance cannot separate herself from the physical home. While the hotel offers the protection of anonymity, it also demands an understanding of identity as independent of material circumstances. Sophia has learned to maneuver in this world, Constance has not.

Sophia's transition from guest to manager to owner and then again to guest allows her to encompass the larger world of the hotel, to encounter

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these spaces in England and France in their various incarnations. She is certainly altered by these encounters, but her identity is not fundamentally transformed. In this novel, the hotel becomes a new and entirely distinctive space. At first a place of mystery and foreign influence, it soon grows familiar and comfortable, a place over which Sophia is able to exercise a degree of control. The temporary connections made in hotels take on enduring meaning as they form individual and collective lives in subtle and not-so-subtle ways, revealing rather than reshaping identity.

Hotel cosmopolitics

> The favorite slander of the narrow nationalist against us cosmopolitans is that we are rootless; what my father believed in, however, was a rooted cosmopolitanism, or, if you like, a cosmopolitan patriotism. Like Gertrude Stein, he thought there was no point in roots if you couldn't take them with you. (Appiah 91)

Like contemporary theorists of cosmopolitanism such as Kwame Anthony Appiah, David Hollinger, and Mitchell Cohen, Bennett and his characters struggle to understand what it means to maintain "rooted" or autonomous identities while at the same time opening themselves to participation in a larger sphere. In *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation* (1998), Bruce Robbins and Pheng Cheah bring together a wide sample of scholarship on cosmopolitanism, but all of it shares a sense of the burden that is assumed by taking seriously cosmopolitanism's premises. We live in a world full of all different kinds of people and must constantly assess the interests of individuals or groups—and perhaps most frequently, nations—against a larger concept of what is right; to establish one's loyalty to a particular place is both to define oneself more clearly and to risk limiting an understanding of the complexities of identity. Bruce Robbins summarizes the problem in its most general terms:

> Yes, we are connected to the earth—but not to "a" place on it, simple and self-evident as the surroundings we see when we open our eyes. We are connected to all sorts of places, casually if not always consciously, including many that we have never traveled to. . . . It is frightening to think how little progress has been made in turning invisibly determining and often exploitative

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> connections into conscious and self-critical ones, how far we remain from mastering the sorts of allegiance, ethics, and action that might go with our complex and multiple belonging. (3)

Bennett's novels suggest that the tasks Robbins and others define might be a good deal less arduous than often supposed—at least under the proper circumstances (the insulation of wealth and the resources it makes available are lost on no one in Bennett's works). As a result, Bennett prefigures many of the debates raised by today's critics. The Racksoles are the epitome of the "rooted cosmopolitanism" suggested by Kwame Anthony Appiah. Their desire to experience England—and the international world that the Grand Babylon opens to them—is not a rejection of their American roots, but its deepest expression. Both Evelyn Orcham and Sophia Baines find themselves most at home in a hotel environment that allows them to interact freely with people of all different backgrounds and nationalities, appreciating rather than resisting difference and exchange. Where "the humanist requires us to put our differences aside," Appiah writes, "the cosmopolitan insists that sometimes it is the differences we bring to the table that make it rewarding to interact at all" (111). In shaping his narratives as he does, Bennett suggests a number of the difficulties outlined by theorists of cosmopolitanism—how to deal with hybridity, for example, or foreignness, or the dangers of deception—need not be quite so difficult, so long as identity is properly understood as inherently (rather than circumstantially) cosmopolitan. In other words, the indeterminacy of the hotel space suggests that while conditions retain their shaping power, finally, cosmopolitan experience depends on independent personal development, with or without the kind of worldly exposure generally associated with the term.

The use of the hotel space as a synecdoche for modern life underscores the more sophisticated and urbane qualities of Bennett's work, which was largely influenced by the literary traditions of France and Russia. Nonetheless, Kurt Koenigsberger (one of the few to recognize this worldly undercurrent) observes that "despite his deep sympathies for things Continental and a mild contempt for narrowly English cultural and political views, Arnold Bennett and his work came to be regarded as essentially provincial over the course of the twentieth century" (131). As I try to suggest, it is time this reading were refined. While Bennett's characters may sometimes give the impression of bourgeois indifference

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to those of lower class or status, as they build their domestic, cosmopolitan lives, they also practice a respect for individual privacy and inscrutability that points toward a new understanding of what it means to be at home in the modern world. The domesticity Bennett maps out is both familiar and new—promising a respite from modern life and a model for living it.

Notes

1. Hotels and boarding houses feature in any number of Bennett's works, and they are notably front and center in *The Card* (1911) and *The Regent* (1913). In the earlier work, main character Edward Henry (Denry) stays in a boarding house in Llandudno and honeymoons in a high-class Swiss hotel; in *The Regent*, he stays for an extended period at Wilkins's, the most elite hotel in London. The eponymous heroine of *Hilda Lessways* (1911) runs a boarding house for a time, and hotels also enter into Bennett's more playful works, such as the short stories collected in *The Loot of Cities* (1905). Clearly for Bennett these establishments are not a special or unusual setting, but a basic feature of modern life.

2. Derek Taylor's *Ritzy: British hotels 1837-1987* provides a detailed account of British hotels during this period (as well as before and after). Elaine Denby's *Grand Hotels: Illusion and Reality* examines the social and architectural history of luxury hotels throughout the world. A more concrete account of the economic and social history of British hotels (and their relation to railway development and tourism) is offered by Jack Simmons, who traces these developments in "Railways, Hotels, and Tourism in Great Britain 1839-1914."

3. Betsy Klimasmith considers the hotel space in Edith Wharton's *The Custom of the Country* and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short fiction. Susan Koprince also turns her attention to Wharton, while Ayako Muneuchi (and others) are intrigued by the hotel rooms of Jean Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight*. Elizabeth Bowen, Henry James, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Gertrude Stein, and Marcel Proust similarly draw the attention of the hotel-minded.

4. Koestenbaum's unclassifiable book contains two separate works within it: a wide-ranging meditation on hotels and the mental and physical spaces they evoke, and a novel titled *Hotel Women*, set in a Hollywood hotel of this name, and featuring Liberace and Lana Turner as main characters struggling with what it means to be "at hotel." The two works run concurrently down either side of the page and challenge the reader to attempt to occupy both simultaneously—and to think critically about the many literary, philosophical, and ethical implications of the hotel and its representation in art.

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5. Orcham was modeled by Bennett on George Reeves-Smith, long-time manager of the Savoy. There is thus an element of the *roman à clef* in *Imperial Palace*.

6. The impressive organization that Orcham has built is impressive to his shareholders only on the basis of its profits, not of any less tangible results. Yet this does not mean that Orcham's own genuine (and non-commercial) devotion to the hotel is not a critical part of the operation—or that it does not have a large part in enabling the positive results investors seek, directly or indirectly.

Elizabeth Outka's discussion of Selfridges department store highlights the ways in which this establishment caters to its customers precisely by treating them not as customers but as guests. The "authentic" reality that is marketed in Selfridges is an ideal home, one in which its customers—and especially its female customers—may do as they please, without any responsibilities or obligations:

> Visitors were given small silver keys on opening day, with the wish that they would feel "at home" in Selfridges. . . . At the top of the store, elaborate and luxurious rooms of rest awaited the guest: reception rooms, a library, the Silence Room, and the Retiring Room, each with special attendants ready to serve the visitors. . . . There were even special rooms for different European guests, decorated in the décor of the visitors' home country and staffed by native speakers so "visitors to town can find themselves a welcome and at home." . . . Of course, Selfridges did not re-create the home but presented a vision of a new and improved home, one that had the markers of comforting familiarity yet promised to improve on the reality. (113)

The ultimate profitability of Selfridges, as its "guests" know (willingly suspend their disbelief though they may), is determined not by goodwill but by sales.

7. Sharon Crozier-De Rosa outlines the frustrations that faced "new women" like Bennett's Hilda Lessways, and, one might argue, like Sophia, who sought professional lives outside of domestic drudgery, only to be confined to "female" jobs (Hilda, too, runs a boarding house for a time) that offered little if any possibility of advancement. The relevance of such struggles in understanding this transitional period of female professionalization is evident, as Crozier-De Rosa argues, from *Hilda Lessways*'s immediate popularity.

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Stopping at the Stone: Rethinking Belief (and Non-Belief) in Modernism Via *A Passage to India*

Craig Bradshaw Woelfel

> The modern mind takes such small flights.
>
> —E. M. Forster in his *Commonplace Book*

The desire to think in binary terms seems to be a part of human nature with respect to belief: we see things—or want to see things—in black and white, yes or no, either/or terms. We want people to believe or not, to be religious or secular, to appeal to revelation or reason. This, in turn, drives us toward monolithic models of the subject and linear narratives of conversion or religious loss: we think of conversion, following Augustine, as a "turning" of the whole self to a state of belief. Historically modernity is equated with wholesale religious loss, and secularity with unbelief and the facile theory of a search for surrogates. As a side-effect, "religion" itself becomes defined in terms of pre-modern institutionalized Christianity, and there is a great reluctance to approach new modes of potential modern religious engagement.

In approaches to literary modernism, the symptoms of this problematic approach manifest most clearly in the kinds of questions we ask about authors and works with respect to religion religion (if we ask them at all): when did so-and-so lose their faith? does such-and-such work evidence belief? if so, in what? These questions reduce things back into simple binaries, monolithic models, and linear narratives—the very structures that we work so hard to dismiss in our attention to broader issues in modernity in favor of models of fragmentation and higher complexity. But new debates

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about how we conceive of secularization—coming largely out of sociology, religious studies, and philosophy—suggest new modes of thinking about religious engagement in modernity that can perhaps lead us in a better direction. These models, in turn, suggest a new sort of question as a starting point for talking about belief: not "is there belief?," but "what does it *mean* to say 'I believe' (or 'disbelieve') in modernity?" By tracking the critical reception of belief in a work that is debatably modernist and in an author who is debatably religious, my hope is to show by example how this new thread of questioning might offer a way out of our usual mode of thinking about religion in modernity, and how it can produce fresh readings of an old subject. This thread may seem to lead into, not out of, a maze—away from the clarity nicely supplied by the usual narrative of religious loss in modernity—but critics will, I hope, agree that this new and more complex model is the better fit for its subject.

E. M. Forster and "lost" faith

E. M. Forster "lost his faith," according to his own belated 1959 account, quickly and quietly over the course of his early years at King's College, Cambridge (1897-1900). The process occurred "partly through [his] friendship with Hugh Meredith, who already disbelieved, and partly because of the general spirit of questioning that is associated with the name of G. E. Moore." He abandoned Church dogma—first the Trinity, then the Incarnation because it hinged on the doctrine of Original Sin, which he had never accepted. He also rejected the personality of Christ. Although Christ offered much that appealed to him—his personal warmth, his suffering in the Passion—Forster saw another, uglier side of Christ's message that he couldn't reconcile with his own developing humanist values:

> away from worldliness and towards preaching and threats, so much emphasis on followers, on an elite, so little intellectual power (as opposed to insight), such an absence of humor that my blood's chilled. I would on the whole rather not meet the speaker, either at an Eliot cocktail party or for a quick Quaker talk, and the fact that my rejection is not vehement does not save it from being tenacious.

And so, as he puts it, "the debunking of Christianity was effected with comparatively little fuss." By the end of his third year at King's he "disbelieved as much" as he would at age eighty (*Prince's Tale* 313-39).

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If we follow the trail of the Cambridge Apostles alluded to in "the general spirit of questioning that is associated with G. E. Moore" it is easy to place Forster in a standard "subtraction" narrative of secularization: he lost his faith because of the pressures of modern scientific and humanist thinking on Church dogma, history, and morality. This religious apparatus subtracted, he was left with his own combination of secular, liberal-humanist ideals. I have always thought the version Forster himself finds in Pater's description of Marcus Aurelius's vision of the ideal city in *Marius the Epicurean* to be a good summary: Pater "describes the longing of Marcus Aurelius for the Ideal City that lies even farther from *his* grasp than it had from Plato's because (unlike Plato) A[urelius] conceived of it as including tenderness and pity; virtue, wisdom, and beauty were not enough" (*Letters* 1.248-49). Forster and Forster critics have given us many versions of his ideals, but the constant bases are the individual freedom and focus on personal relationships embodied in *Howards End*'s famous motto, "Only connect."

But this is hardly to say that his understanding of those ideals remained static. In 1937 Forster wrote "Three Generations," an essay that divides history from about 1900 to 1937 into three acts: "Hope Without Faith" (Liberalism's heyday around the turn of the century- WWI); "Curiosity" (the '20s); and "Faith Without Hope" (beginning in 1930 or so, and ending "as soon as one major European power bombs the capital of another") (*Creator*). Forster identifies himself with the first phase, using the inclusive "we" to describe it, but an objective third-person for the other two:

> We were all of us, in a sense, liberals. We thought that evolution, speeded up here and there by the efforts of individuals, would gradually make the world better. We weren't gay about it. . . .It was a despairing age, and yet it hoped. How can I bring it before you? I think best by a remark which was made to me [by a fellow undergraduate]. "I suppose," he said tragically, "that actually the worst of all things will happen, and that the world will get tediously better and better." . . .We had no conception of the horrors which science had in store for the human race. (*Creator*)

Liberalism's "Hope without Faith" was a hope that the pursuits of rationalism and individualism would lead, unaided by anything beyond the human, to progress, but Forster criticizes this optimism as a false hope.

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extending the ideals of individual freedom and personal relations "beyond their appropriate sphere" (*Creator* 99-100). He writes that many had intimations of this error before 1914, but that it was undeniably the War that caused liberals to adjust in the direction of skepticism. And Forster certainly adjusts. As he moves into his second career as an essayist and public intellectual, he grows increasingly ambivalent about the kind of naïve liberal-humanism advocated in his early novels. Critics have labeled this shift as a skeptical or pragmatic maturation—from a dreamy Edwardian youth to a grounded thinker and writer concerned with social, political, and economic realities. And this turn has become the positive proof, as it shows up in his mature style and thought, for a "modernist" Forster.[1] So Forster grows up, and the subtraction narrative gets completed: first religion and then naïve liberalism are sloughed off and matured beyond. The modern species remains: secular skeptic, unbeliever.

But at exactly the time Forster was losing his faith at Cambridge and starting on the road to skeptical humanism, he was exploring another path—religious experience. Between 1902 and 1905 Forster underwent (at least) four visionary experiences. Each of these events was linked to acts of writing: three short stories—in order, "The Story of a Panic," "The Road from Colonus," and "The Rock"—and "indirectly, complicatedly," his novel *The Longest Journey*. Forster returned often to the connection between visionary and aesthetic experience in his criticism, but the primary space for his exploration of visionary experience more broadly would become India.

Hinduism signified for Forster an experiential conception of religion itself, one that he opposed to the Western Judeo-Christian tradition based on dogma, law, and codes of conduct (*Prince's Tale* 222). In this sense, Forster's interest in India participates in the explosion of contemporaneous Western interest in new experiential understandings of religion, often under the heading of "mysticism." Hinduism became for him a space to work through the implications of that vague, transcendent reality behind appearances ubiquitous in his novels—and operating underneath his ideals of individualism and personal relationships—without resorting to a didactic, ascetic, impersonal, morally codified Christianity. Although religious experience would remain both a muddle *and* mystery, it exerted a persistent influence throughout Forster's life.

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Craig Bradshaw Woelfel

A Passage To India: mysticism, skepticism, and modernity

These two strands of Forster—skeptical humanist and religious visionary—come together in *Passage to India,* easily the most skeptical of Forster's novels, and yet one whose visionary aspects must also be taken seriously. Considering all that Forster experienced during the decade separating the two fits of composition that produced *Passage,* it is a minor miracle that the novel coheres as well as it does, but it is also no surprise that for critics exactly what it coheres around has remained a source of controversy. The novel achieved success largely because of its political timeliness, an odd fact given that its events mix the relative political calm of Forster's 1912-13 visit to India and the turmoil of his post-WWI and post-Amritsar visit in 1921. Though read as timely, it is also a novel, as P. N. Furbank put it, that exists "out of time" (2.106).

In a later talk entitled "Three Countries" Forster indicates he wished the novel to be about the "unseen," beyond politics, that he equated with India's "religious sense":

> the book is not really about politics, though it is the political aspect of it that caught the general public and made it sell. It's about something wider than politics, about the search of the human race for a more lasting home, about the universe as embodied in the Indian earth and the Indian sky, about the horror lurking in the Marabar Caves and the release symbolized by the birth of Krishna. It is—or rather desires to be—philosophic and poetic. (qtd. in Ganguly 2)

We may be wary of taking Forster at his word some thirty years after the fact. But a letter to his friend Forrest Reid written in February 1913, shortly before he abandoned his first go at the novel, suggests that a desire to engage religious India informed the novel from the start. He wanted, he told Reid, "something beyond the field of action and behavior; the waters of the river that rises from the middle of the earth to join the Ganges and the Jumna where they join. India is full of such wonders, but she can't give them to me" (*Selected* 1.187). The spot where the Ganges and Jumna join was alleged to be the site of a third river "sacred and invisible except to the eye of faith." Forster made an attempt to see the spot himself on his 1912-13 trip, but mystery turned to muddle: his guides got tired and lost, and he never arrived there (1.174-75).

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The centrality of religious experience to *Passage* prompted Forster's friend Roger Fry to say that although the writing was beautiful he wished Forster "weren't a mystic, or that he would keep his mysticism out of his books" (qtd. in Trilling 44). Though it didn't quite put him in for the kind of contempt Woolf expressed for T. S. Eliot's conversion a few years later—"there's something obscene in a living person sitting by the fire and believing in God" (qtd. in Pearce 175)—there was something in Forster's religious attitude that was seen as incongruous with Bloomsbury's detached skepticism. He felt the incongruity himself, and expressed it in his *Commonplace Book* (48-49). Later critics have evidenced this apparent tension in *Passage,* in a strain of debate about the novel's two persistent pressures: the skeptical (or practical) and the mystical.

I would argue, to put it polemically, that in addressing the confluence of these pressures criticism has come from a wrong angle—seeing the skeptical and the religious as mutually exclusive modes of understanding set in binary opposition. Such an approach reflects a naïve conception of the relationship between secular modes of understanding (here, skeptical or pragmatic humanism) and religious engagement in modernity, along the lines of the "subtraction" narrative of Forster's development outlined above. Critics writing on *Passage*'s mature humanism, skepticism, pragmatism, modernism, irony, etc. have either outright ignored the novel's religious engagement, or accepted that the novel's obvious skepticism trumps any positive religious position.[2] I am more interested in the problem seen from the other side: critics arguing for a positive reading of the novel's religious engagement—including Eugene Webb, Adwaita Ganguly, Michael Orange, Doreen D'Cruz, Tracy Pintchman, Jeffrey Heath, and Michael Roeschlein—have persistently argued that Hindu mysticism in the novel somehow absorbs or triumphs over the novel's apparent skepticism, netting a positive religious position.[3]

Readings from either camp focus on the novel's treatment of religious experience, most prominently Hindu mysticism. On the skeptic side, Hindu mysticism in the novel, like Christianity and Islam, is presented and in turn subverted because of its failure to bring epistemological certainty or to lead to positive political, social, or even personal change; Forster's focus is on humanity's inability to "ravish the unknown." On the religious side, the argument runs that the novel's consistent irony, paradox, subversion, or emphasis on the limitations of human consciousness and practical failure are appropriated as negative aspects within a greater whole em-

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bodied in Hinduism's pluralistic capacity for multiple viewpoints as well as its acceptance of disorder, destruction, the failure of vision, paradox, "non-being," cyclical rebirth, etc.

My point is not that previous readings are "wrong" in any simple way, or don't admit of complexity. But there is in them that tendency to approach the religious and the secular as a question of either/or: either the novel is a skeptical critique of religion's false promises and human limitations, or it advocates the promises of mysticism *beyond* the skeptical humanism of the West and its practical means of measure. At best it can't decide between the two options, as if Forster is confused by competing exclusive understandings. This is part and parcel of the natural tendency to approach belief as a narrative, progressing (depending upon one's point of view) toward a position of secular unbelief or of religious faith.

Michael Roeschlein has given us the most recent iteration of this latter approach. Roeschlein's argument is that the "modernist" aspects of Forster's writing—irony, paradox, skepticism, juxtaposition of multiple ideological viewpoints, and the undercutting maneuver that Trilling famously dubbed the "double turn"—are neither simply iconoclasm nor a "predecessor of deconstructive deferral, but . . . rather a literary rendering of the dynamism of mystical religion found in traditions both Eastern and Western." Such stylistic tendencies in the novel, he shows, can be linked to those of accounts of mystical experience—paradox, contradiction, focus on the limits of consciousness, etc. (67-69). Like previous readings in its vein, Roeschlein argues that although the novel undermines any simple advocacy of Hinduism, Godbole's mystical vision subsumes the novel's representation of the limits of vision. Although he substitutes the broader term "religious experience" for Hinduism, Roeschlein's argument is the same as previous religious readings in opposing religious modes of understanding to secular; his innovation is to have made the argument not just one of content, but of Forster's style and form, so that the text itself embodies a skepticism-defeating mysticism.

Roeschlein consistently pulls toward an argument about the novel's ultimate position: does the novel's skepticism preclude a positive religious position, or does the novel advocate mysticism? Roeschlein argues that Forster's skepticism, irony, etc. cannot be taken as dismissive of all religious engagement, because that skepticism is itself subverted. At times he claims only that we must see how this leaves ambivalence in terms of a final position on the transcendent: Forster's "doubt of the transcendent"

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is paired with "doubt of the effectiveness of doubting the transcendent," his irony "demystifies" but then "remystifies" (78, 76, 84). However, he more often offers that this ambivalence performs a positive function and that the "reader is encouraged to interpret *A Passage to India* as a journey through skepticism back to a faith cleansed of the detritus of calcified habit" (84-85, 90, 92-93, 97). This works in conjunction with the formal features common to accounts of mystical experience, and thus the novel in sum can be read as a mystical text and/or as advocating mysticism.

The either/or mentality common to religious readings of the text becomes most apparent in Roeschlein's claim that secular modes of critical understanding—"the vocabularies of idealism, humanism, symbolism, Romanticism, organicism, Jungian psychology, aestheticism, or literary mythopoeia" (73); or, as he adds later, pragmatism and moral realism—cannot account for the religious aspects of the novel because they "naturalize the supernatural" (69). On the other side, Roeschlein holds that the context of religious studies is superior because, we must suppose, it does not "naturalize the supernatural," and thus it reveals a religious dimension of the novel secular vocabularies miss. In the process he conflates modern religious studies with the claims of its object of study, mysticism, effacing important distinctions between the work of James, Underhill, and Inge, who take drastically different authorial approaches to their subject in terms of any possible religious/secular spectrum (17).

Roeschlein's supposedly inadequate secular "vocabularies" often have, of course, been made consistent with openly mystical positions.[4] Moreover, reductionism is not properly a matter of critical vocabulary, but rather of either (1) the experiences or beliefs of the critics themselves; or (2) the tacit assumptions about secularity held by most critics, that to read *Passage* in terms of secular vocabularies is to equate the novel with a position of unbelief. Roeschlein holds that certain frames are or are not capable of treating religious issues, and thus subscribes to the same secular/religious division, though from the other side. That critics may naturalize the supernatural is actually irrelevant to Roeschlein's main argument: a summary of the correspondences between the stylistic features of mystical accounts and the style of Forster's novel need neither be open to the supernatural nor closed off from it to evidence a correspondence.[5]

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A new paradigm: Forster under cross-pressures

The either/or approach implicates critical understanding with a less bombastic version of the "Culture Wars" mentality of a two-sided battle between religion and secularity. Such an understanding fails to truly account for the complexity of religious engagement in modernity; more to the point, it does not do justice to the complexity of *Passage*. Recent debates about the secularization of the West, primarily in religious studies and sociology, have challenged the narrative of secularity behind such understandings, the net result of which has been a destabilization of any simple opposition between modernity and secularity, or belief and unbelief in modernity.[6] This paper will draw primarily from one work amongst those debates, Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* (2007), in order to develop a new means of understanding the tensions between secular skepticism and mysticism in Forster.

Taylor's work is significant in that, rather than rejecting the broad understanding that modernity has become secular, he argues modernity is definitively secular but that this nevertheless ought not make us exclude religion from the picture.[7] His argument is founded on the principle that theories of secularization that oppose religion and secularization—such as so-called "subtraction" theories—are not quite looking at modernity from the right angle. There have generally been two broad manners of approach, he says, for theorizing modern secularism: 1) those that deal with shifts in public spaces; and 2) those that deal with a general decline in religious belief and practice. Taylor looks instead at what he calls "the conditions of belief" that affect both 1 and 2, or what (following Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and others) he calls the "background" of the subject of belief: the ways that people experience, understand, and contextualize the questions surrounding belief and unbelief (172-73).

Although modern secularity is characterized by religious loss in certain simple senses (loss of orthodox practice, of naïve belief, of public spaces), Taylor shows that there are a host of new modes of religious engagement in modernity that, rather than being *opposed* to a broadly secular background of understanding, are situated within that background. Taylor sees these new forms as emerging from what he calls "cross-pressures"—resistances to religious orthodoxy or tradition *and* resistances (like Romanticism and the "Immanent Counter-Enlightenment") to understandings of rationality that exclude any transcendent force, what

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he calls an "exclusive humanism," accounting for the individual, society, and the universe in entirely immanent terms (Chapter 16).

Such "cross-pressures" lead to a variety of positions within a default immanent, secular frame—where the question of whether one is "open" or "closed" to a transcendent power is difficult to navigate, and ontological commitments remain uncertain. Secular understanding is brought to bear on traditional religious texts and institutions, but the limitations that push people toward purely immanent or scientific modes of understanding also prompt new engagements with what can be called the "religious," that posits a *super*natural dimension to the universe, human action, and values (Taylor 428, Bruce *God* 58-59). In the discourse of religious experience, this dimension explicitly claims to *supersede* the claims of human thought or sense; yet, as I'll explain, this claim is itself not beyond the reach of rational critique and, in fact, is highly suspect. The result is not a tug of war between religious tradition and secular humanism, but, rather, an increasingly complex field in which "the debate swirls among a wider and wider range of participants, between whom a multiplicity of lateral, cross-cutting affinities arise" (Taylor 374).

"Cross-pressures" produce what Taylor argues emerges concurrently with high literary modernism:

> a space in which people can wander between and around all these options [of belief] without having to land clearly and definitively in any one. . . .Indeed, this is part of the reason why the war [between belief and unbelief] is constantly running out of steam in modern civilization, in spite of the efforts of zealous minorities. (351)

Thus,

> The salient feature of Western societies is not so much a decline of religious faith and practice, though there has been lots of that . . . but rather a mutual fragilization of different religious positions as well as of the outlooks both of belief and unbelief. The whole culture experiences cross-pressures, between the draw of the narratives of closed immanence on one side, and the sense of their inadequacy on the other, strengthened by encounter with existing milieux of religious practice, or just by some intimations of the transcendent. (596)

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Taylor's argument has two broad implications which I'd like to explore in terms of Forster's religious engagement in *Passage*, both of which suggest new readings of the text: we cannot exclude religion from, or oppose it to, modernist thinking, simply because the latter is embedded in an ironic or skeptical context. What we ought to still term "religious" engagements emerge out of dissatisfactions with entirely *closed* immanent accounts (i.e., exclusive humanism); that is to say, they are intentional engagements with the transcendent. To properly understand this modern religious engagement, however, we need to situate it *within* pragmatic, skeptical, aesthetic, or otherwise modern and secular modes of understanding. Second, the notions of cross-pressures and a new background of understanding suggest that we ought *not* see a simple position of belief or unbelief in *Passage*, in Forster's thought more broadly. This is different even than saying that a text is ambivalent or confused. Rather, we must see how religious and secular frames are not mutually exclusive strands, and how the very idea of being a "believer" or "unbeliever" has ceased to be an either/or question, since the very concept of belief has changed. Not only is a genuine but partial position possible, but various pressures that might fall on either side of the religious or secular divide can present themselves in varying strengths over time without being resolved altogether. This suggests a means of understanding modern religious engagement in concord with our ubiquitous understanding of modern, fragmented subjectivity. This notion of subjectivity has not yet been incorporated into our thinking about religion, which remains linear and coherent; in other words, premodern.

Forster and modern religious experience

Seeing Forster as cross-pressured gives us a new frame for reading his complex combination of anti-orthodoxy, skeptical liberal-humanism, and attraction to Hindu religious experience. Consider a letter Forster wrote to Lorna B. Wood in March of 1919 about his ongoing Indian reading, full of issues that make their way into *Passage*:

> Just now I am struggling with a great work on Pantheism (mainly Indian) in order to squash it into a 1000 words review, and attempting to master the difference between "God is all" and "all is God." One can always explain away a creed by regarding

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> it as an expression of human need, and I am fairly smart at such explanations. But the real, the supreme question, Is it True? isn't touched at all by such methods. Some people want the human to be the ultimate reality, others the non human. So much one can see, and from their wishes one can deduce their beliefs—Christianity in Europe, Buddhism, Brahmanism &ct in India. But it tells one nothing of the truth of their beliefs—nothing about the ultimate constitution of the universe.—This last phrase sounds "scientific," but don't damn it as such. Science will never explain the ultimate constitution, I am sure. It will get deeper into the facts of life, and the fact of life will always elude it, like the retreating rainbow. Quite what this queer thing is which interpenetrates matter and animates in different degrees me, Sir Courtauld Thomson, the cats, the daffodils, and a grain of sand, we shall never know by science. We shan't know, either, by first deciding what we would like it to be. At least that's my present feeling. (*Selected* 1.301)

It is remarkable, first of all, how much contemporaneous religious studies writing this letter reflects. It fractures belief into a series of interrelated issues springing from the problem of particularity and unity in the moment of mystical union. What I want to emphasize, though, is that this is a cross-pressured letter—impossible to read wholly in terms of belief or unbelief, to see as either religious or secular, though it is neither halfway in-between nor uncertain. We might account for this by saying that Forster has a secular interest in religious issues. But the pressure of Forster's psychological, philosophical, or sociological explanations of religious problems is crossed here by two others: by his condemnation of a scientific approach to the "the ultimate constitution of the universe" or "the fact of life" (exclusive humanism); and by his sure feeling that some "queer thing" does indeed unify all material particulars, and that there is a single "fact of life" beyond the reach of any rational approach. This introduces the question of religious experience, which offered an epistemological claim to truth beyond the paradoxes and contradictions of dogma, the inquiries of reason or science, or the solipsistic wall of the self. But Forster did not simply trade rational for experiential or spiritual modes of knowing. His closing comment that "we shan't know [Truth], either, by first deciding what we would like it to be" points toward epistemological and

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hermeneutic problems at the heart of experiential conceptions of religion, and to this set of problems I would now like to turn.[8]

In his essay on the term "Experience," Robert Sharf examines the difficulties of the word in question in the context of religious studies. There are two accepted definitions of "experience," the first being the common "to participate in" or "to live through," and the second more epistemological definition of "to directly perceive" or "to be conscious of" (104). In the context of religious experience there is a conflict between these definitions: the first indicates that experience is mediated by action—by the self's participation in an event taking place in time, space, and a linguistic/cultural context. Meanwhile, the second definition has been used in "religious experience" to signify those experiences which are direct or unmediated. Religious experience is that which "transcends all concepts" or is ineffable, that which is not constructed; it takes the experiencer out of or beyond the mediations and limitations of consciousness, subjectivity, time, space, etc. that make "normal" experience problematic (96-97, 105). This was the appeal of religious experience as a resistance to the debunking of religious dogma and history by scientific skepticism: it posited an epistemological and hermeneutic authority that was not subject to scientific testing (being ineffable, thus beyond reason or analysis). It is also the appeal that religious experience offered to perennialist notions of religion, by providing a universal authorizing base for religion independent of particular traditions or doctrines.

But there is an epistemological/hermeneutic problem here. Sharf explains:

> to have any sort of determinate meaning, we must construe the term "experience" in referential or ostensive terms. But to do so is to objectify it, which would seem to undermine its most salient characteristic, namely, its immediacy. So we are posed with a difficult dilemma: experience cannot be determinate without being rendered a "thing"; if it is a thing it cannot be indubitable; but if it is not a thing, then it cannot perform the hermeneutic task that religious scholars require of it—that of determining meaning. (104)

Thus, if defined as beyond discursive definition, "religious experience" is an oxymoron, a term that necessarily deconstructs itself. The experience may be unmediated, but in terms of any determinate meaning it

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must give up that claim. Logically speaking, then, religious experience ought not be seen as capable of authorizing any knowledge as Truth or objective meaning. In its conceptualization, realization, description, or in terms of the knowledge that it claims to authorize, religious experience functions as what literary scholars would call an empty signifier. The point of Sharf's essay is chiefly to expose the ideological function of the apparently innocuous message of a unifying, universal and absolute numinous experience. Sharf's solution is perfectly logical: the only way out of the problem is to cease conceiving of religious experience as referring to any experience at all. If religious experience is nonobjective, indeterminate, and resists signification, then in dealing with accounts of mystical experience "one cannot claim to be dealing with an experience at all." There are other "complex historical, sociological, and psychological processes" at work (110-13).

Sharf's argument about religious experience sheds light not only on the letter to Lorna B. Wood above, but also on *Passage*. Forster presents the promise of a universal and ineffable experience "beyond the limits that fetter us now," as he says in *Howards End,* but we can see how, rather than simply raising questions about whether this experience is real, or transcendence possible, Forster presents a critique of the issues that the concept of religious experience necessarily entails, on three levels: ideological, practical, and epistemological/hermeneutic. This critique is most obvious in the expedition to the Marabar Caves but, contrary to previous critical readings, it is also apparent in Godbole's Hindu visionary experience and the festival of Gokul Ashtami.

Despite this skeptical critique, however, *Passage* also crucially rejects Sharf's logical conclusion that religious experience ought not be considered real experience at all. The novel evidences what I will call *dissociated belief*—holding to fundamental rational, practical, and epistemological critiques of religious experience while also maintaining the reality of that experience. In fact, though Forster maintains a secular and skeptical understanding, he forwards religious experience as a possible space within which his skepticism and his skeptical humanism can operate—a source of pity and tolerance that works against what he sees as the negative consequences of belief.

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"An immense peal of thunder, unaccompanied by lightning"

The dramatic and thematic center of *Passage,* the expedition to the Marabar Caves, is also the section that Forster had the most difficulty writing (*Manuscripts* xviii-ix, xvii). Undoubtedly, Forster struggled with issues of plot and character (i.e., Adela's possible rape, the characters of Fielding, Adela, and Mrs. Moore). But even as elements of plot and character shift from version to version, the essential element of the caves—their offer of ineffable and unmediated experience—remains a constant presence, suggesting that Forster built this section around their function as a site of religious experience.[9] The expedition is motivated precisely by what Sharf sees as the "humanistic impulse that motivates . . . the desire to countenance a diversity of world views" (110) that lies behind the concept of religious experience. Representing a panoply of religious attitudes (including the atheist Fielding), *Passage*'s main characters come together in the Indian city of Chandrapore because "God has put us on the earth in order to be pleasant to each other. God . . . is . . . love," and "has put us on earth to love our neighbors and show it, and he is omnipresent" (53). The outing is proposed at a tea party in Chapter VII—the only instance in the novel in which all of the main characters are present—as all are struggling to overcome their individual biases and to become friends. As the possibility of unity through politics or social relations is exposed early as a failure, the trip to the Marabar becomes a chance along spiritual lines.

Forster writes the caves as an embodiment of religious experience itself, both in its transcendent hope and in terms of the threefold critique discussed above. They are described as ineffable, preexisting and remaining unassimilated by the particular groups, societies, political factions, or religious traditions that have subsequently developed there. Universal and changeless, dating from before "the India we call immemorial began," they survive the superficial changes of India itself, laying claim to extraordinary meaning independent of any description, report, or attachment to object or idea: their meaning, that is, is only accessible *as an experience.* Though literally they "are readily described," their essence is "something unspeakable . . . like nothing else in the world, [with] no relation to anything dreamt or seen." Yet this essence has a real presence in the world, for though "nothing, nothing attaches to them . . . they have a reputation [which] does not depend on human speech." The most famous cave,

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atop the Kawa Dol, is a material symbol of the epistemological problem of religious experience: the ineffable experience the caves promise exists in this most famous cave only in potential. The "cave" is not actually accessible, only the hollow inside of a boulder "that swings on the summit of the highest of the hills." The cave (or, more properly, the stone) "has neither ceiling nor floor, and mirrors its own darkness in every direction infinitely." This is a description with obvious religious parallels in concepts of the godhead, but here we have not light reflecting upon itself (and all things) but darkness, suggesting a Truth that exists but is inaccessible in its essence (135-38).

The way Forster frames the expedition suggests that the attempt to reach this potentially unifying experience is itself mediated. Originally the expedition is to involve Christians, Moslems, a Hindu, and an atheist. Aziz is careful with food and preparations; he does not want to offend anyone. And yet, when Godbole miscalculates the length of a prayer, he and Cyril, the atheist, miss the train by mere seconds. Aziz is heartbroken, but Mrs. Moore reassures him that all manner of things shall be well for the rest of the group "shall all be Moslems together now" (144). Mrs. Moore's statement signals a humanistic impulse, but it also signals that we are already engaged in a particular set of signs and meanings with ideological consequences. In this case, Aziz organizes the expedition and we end up, after losing Godbole and Fielding, with only the two characters of indeterminate or open religiosity along for the journey—Adela and Mrs. Moore—and they are willing to play along that "they shall all be Moslems together."

The transcendent experience of the caves is also necessarily depicted as mediated. They simply cannot be accessed in their pure state. "An entrance was necessary, so mankind made one" (138), and inside, the caves are utterly dark and the only way to see is, literally, to strike your own match:

> There is little to see and no eye to see it, until the visitor arrives for his five minutes, and strikes a match. Immediately another flame rises in the depths of the rock and moves toward the surface like an imprisoned spirit . . . the two flames approach and strive to unite, but cannot, because one of them breathes air, the other stone. (137)

The matchlight reflection, like the echo, suggests that religious experience can only occur as a distortion or trace, self-initiated, and apposite to but not identical with the thing itself.

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Appropriately, Forster passes over Mrs. Moore's actual cave experience. We are given only her record of it: "for an instant she went mad," she was touched by something which she could not define, then she heard an echo, and then she left. The only thing she takes out of the experience is the echo, which pounds in her head as she tries to understand it. The more she attempts to do so, the more the "echo [begins] in some indeterminate way to undermine her hold on life" (165).[10] The effect of the echo on Mrs. Moore after her experience foregrounds a further problem inherent in religious experience's goal: the linked notions of transcendent unity and Absolute knowledge. As Mrs. Moore attempts to understand the experience and thus approaches these limits, the experience breaks down her ability to value, judge, or distinguish:

> Coming at a moment when she had chanced to be fatigued, it had managed to murmur, "Pathos, piety, courage—they exist, but are identical, and so is filth. Everything exists, nothing has value." If one had spoken vileness in that place, or quoted lofty poetry, the comment would have been the same—"ou-boum." If one had spoken with the tongues of angels and pleaded for all the unhappiness and misunderstanding on the world, past, present, and to come, for all the misery men must undergo whatever their opinion and position, and however much they dodge or bluff—it would amount to the same.[11] (165)

Mrs. Moore's struggle here exemplifies the epistemological and hermeneutic problems posed by the goal of transcendent unity: a truly inclusive unity would actually *have* to be meaningless. The problem, Forster suggests, is inherent in the way that humans make meaning: neither understanding nor meaning can occur unless relationships are registered between things. To ascribe meaing or value to experience, that is, we must *distinguish,*——and thus exclude, order, and hierarchize—one of the oldest jobs of religious texts. This process is not inert: to make value and meaning we exclude, order, hierarchize. No whole could have value unless it excluded something; the things absorbed in that whole could not have meaning or value unless they were distinguished from each other. Either scenario sacrifices transcendent unity. Everyone, not just Mrs. Moore, fails to "ravish the unknown."

Forster broaches this dilemma in a characteristically subtle passage at the very beginning of the novel, exemplifying the blend of pathos, comedy, irony, and earnestness that marks the best of his writing:

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> All invitations must proceed from heaven perhaps; perhaps it is futile for men to initiate their own unity, they do but widen the gulfs between them at the attempt. So at all events thought old Mr. Graysford and young Mr. Sorley, the devoted missionaries who lived out beyond the slaughterhouses, always travelled third on the railways, and never came to the club. In our father's house are many mansions, they taught, and there alone will the incompatible multitudes of mankind be welcomed and soothed. Not one shall be turned away on that verandah, be he black or white, not one shall be kept standing who approaches with a loving heart. And why should the divine hospitality cease here? Consider, with all reverence, the monkeys. May there not be a mansion with the monkeys also? Old Mr. Graysford said No, but young Mr. Sorley, who was advanced, said Yes; he saw no reason why monkeys should not have their collateral share of bliss, and he had sympathetic discussions about them with his Hindu friends. And the jackals? Jackals were indeed less to Mr. Sorley's mind but he admitted the mercy of God, being infinite, may well embrace all mammals. And the wasps? He became uneasy during the descent to the wasps, and was apt to change the conversation. And oranges, cactuses, crystals and mud? and the bacteria inside Mr. Sorley? No, no, this is going too far. We must exclude someone from our gathering, or we shall be left with nothing. (38)

Filling the empty signifier, we sacrifice real unity; to fix our echo, realigning it with our subjectivity, we assign value, systematize, define, and exclude, "widening the gulfs." Thus, as Fielding later observes, though "the original sound may be harmless, . . . the echo is always evil" (137). The empty signifier of the Marabar caves becomes, what Sharf, describing religious experience, calls "a mere placeholder that entails a substantive if indeterminate terminus for the deferral of meaning." When the empty signifier is filled, we see, as Sharf says "what makes the term experience so amenable to ideological appropriation"—it continues to assert tremendous force, though never as the transcendent thing itself. After the caves, of course, Adela's own experience of a "touch" in the caves leads to the trial and the polarizing actions that shape the rest of the novel.

If *Passage* thus critiques the promise of religious experience, Mrs. Moore's struggle with the echo also suggests skepticism toward mysticism's epistemological claims. Accounts of mystical experience claim to allow

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both particularity and total transcendent union, and hold that such totality can be valued in positive terms such as love, good, perfection, etc. But if such a unity were called love, it would also include all apparent good and evil, rendering the word meaningless—as Mrs. Moore contemplates, it would be a "love" that must include rape (224, 231). In a 1917 letter to Florence Barger, Forster had thought about this issue in terms of the hope of attributing a "positive" value to any universal system, like Platonism (where the One is a positive containing all things in perfection). Forster had been reading Spinoza, and found his insistence on apparently "negative" attributes like disorder and imperfection in the universe to be

> a corrective for the Platonism into which, when trying to think big, most us, whether Christian or not, tend to slop. "Men find it far easier to imagine than to understand."—"Because men find order harmonious, or find that what is in order is easier to remember, they like to imagine that there is order in the universe." He conceives of the universe (or, as he calls it, God) as containing every imperfection conceivable to man as well as every perfection, it would not be infinite otherwise. And it also contains every inconceivable perfection and imperfection. (*Selected* 1.272)

Encountering in the echo the limits of meaningful experience, Mrs. Moore is so disturbed and weakened by the echo that she takes "the shortest and the easiest cut to the unseen" (234), and accepts Christianity. The echo subsides. In *Passage,* such acceptance seems inevitable:

> how indeed is it possible for one human to be sorry for all the sadness that meets him on the face of the earth, for the pain that is endured not only by men, but by animals and plants, perhaps by the stones? The soul is tired in a moment, and in fear of losing what little she does understand, she retreats to the permanent lines which habit or chance have dictated, and suffers there. (275)

Shortly thereafter she takes the shorter and easier route used by so many of Forster's favorite characters: she dies.

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Godbole and the stone

Mrs. Moore's inability to make meaning out of her experience of the caves has been read as exemplifying the inadequacy of the Western conceptual framework to accommodate the confusion of mystical experience. I have argued, in contrast, that it represents an exploration of the practical, ideological, hermeneutic, and epistemological problems inherent in religious experience itself. But critics have also seen Mrs. Moore's failure as superseded by the religious experience of Professor Godbole: he appears to accept the limits of human consciousness and our necessary failure of man to "ravish the unknown," they suggest, but his Hindu theology can incorporate both the failure of vision and the "muddle" of an inclusive unity into a meaningful whole, symbolized by his vision and by the festival of Gokul Ashtami. After all, he lets in the wasp that Mr. Sorley fails to include. But there is good reason to propose, however, that *Passage* subjects Godbole's experience to the same critiques we see in the caves episode, and even that it does not go as far as Mrs. Moore's struggle with the echo.

Forster wrote the "Temple" section of the novel comparatively quickly, after the return from his 1921 trip to India. The festival of Gokul Ashtami and Godbole's vision are based on his own experiences with the Maharajah of Dewas, supplemented by reading of Hindu scripture and by notes supplied by his successor as Secretary to the Maharajah as to details of the festival itself. Forster's own letters about his time with the Maharajah indicate that despite his interest in Hindu religious ecstasy: (1) he was not compelled to believe that it offered greater access to actual truth or that it had a better claim to authenticity than any other experience; and (2) he felt that in including so much it failed to resolve from muddle into practical knowledge, order, beauty, or action (*Hill* 106). The second critique is easiest to show, and has been noted by G. K. Das (93). For Forster, Indian religion accommodated individual expression and pursuit of the divine, but meaning or right action wasn't always discernible. The Maharajah was, Forster says, saturated with the religious sense, but it led to contradiction in his thought and action and to the inattention and ineptitude as a politician that Forster remarked on elsewhere (*Hill* 115). The chaos of Gokul Ashtami, Godbole's sense of detachment, and his cryptic response to the incident in the caves all suggest that, despite being better able to tolerate apparent contradictions and encouraging personal understanding of the divine, Hinduism in the novel is subject to the practical critiques of religious experience.

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Epistemologically and hermeneutically, the question is more complex. Hinduism's capacity for muddle and Godbole's emphasis on the limits of vision suggest that he can indeed make meaning of the kind of religious experience that drives Mrs. Moore to madness. But Godbole's resolving his experience into coherent meaning (for himself) has only to do with the fact that his is always already situated within a particular system of meaning he accepts as true. That is to say, he never crosses the lines "habit and chance have dictated" that Mrs. Moore crosses in the caves and, eventually, must retreat back to. His theology admits possible limitations to religious vision, but this offers nothing in the way of proof about the *truth* of Godbole's vision—its claims to being *actual* experience of the noumena—or the truth claims of the Hindu theological system that give that vision its form and resolve it into meaning. Godbole is a Hindu Brahman who seeks Krishna and who sees Krishna, who believes Krishna will never come, and Krishna does not: as Ganguly writes of Hindu visionary worship, "the Divine essence of Krishna is revealed to his devotees according to the nature of their desires" (256). Godbole's vision, then, is mediated by his cultural and linguistic environment, rather than transcending it. As Forster says in his letter to Wood, "we shan't know [Truth] by first deciding what we would like it to be."

Indeed, where critics have seen the meaning-effacing experience of the caves as incorporated into Godbole's vision, there are textual clues that he does not go as far as Mrs. Moore. If he goes further than Mr. Sorley in including the wasp, Godbole stops nonetheless. And he stops at the stone: His ecstatic vision builds and he "impels" by his spiritual force a vision of Mrs. Moore "to that place where completeness can be found. Completeness not reconstruction." Next he "remembered a wasp seen he forget where, perhaps on a stone." Imitating God, he impels it as well. "And the stone where was clung—could he . . . no, he could not, he had been wrong to attempt the stone, logic and conscious effort had seduced" (321), and he is pulled out of his vision back to self-consciousness. Plenty of readers have remembered where the wasp comes from. It sits on a peg, not a stone. But why a stone here? I would offer that it is a synecdoche for the meaning-effacing transcendent extreme of the caves, the force of the echo that Professor Godbole never himself experiences because his experience is always already contextualized, its meaning always constructed. It is Godbole who initially suggests visiting the caves, but as Mrs. Moore notes, he mentions no echo (163). Indeed, there is no direct indication

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that he has ever even been to the caves. He frames his knowledge of them only in terms of their special reputation—like Aziz, who acknowledges he has never visited them—and it is his religious practices specifically that prevent him from making the expedition (79-81).

Roeschlein notes that in the caves section the stones are actually personified—"the boulders said, 'I am alive,' the small stones answered 'I am almost alive'" (81)—but when he calls this "the narrator's satirical jab," there is no reason to characterize it as such. The line sits directly in between Mrs. Moore's horrified contemplation of the echo and Aziz and Adela's trip up to the caves (*Passage* 181)—an unlikely moment for satire.[12] The caves themselves, remember, are just stones that have been opened by humans. It is quite possible that for Forster the idea of stones symbolizing the limits of meaningful transcendence derives from Plotinus's concept of the One, which Forster considers in *Alexandria,* the book he worked on during the War, during his break from *Passage*. Plotinus's "One" is a unity upon which nothing can be predicated, not even that it exists. It has no qualities besides effusive excess. As a result, though he also finds it emotionally compelling, Forster finds Plotinus's system "unattractive as well as abstruse" (70): "the whole Universe has an inclination toward good. We are all parts of God, *even the stones,* though we cannot realize it; and man's goal is to become actually, as he is potentially, divine" [emphasis added]). Recall, too, that stones are the limit of the soul's sympathy in the description of Mrs. Moore's failure to assimilate her echo; Godbole's stopping at the stone, then, marks the limit of his vision.

At the height of Godbole's vision, though it includes Mrs. Moore and the wasp, we are still firmly within the bounds of his consciousness. Though his "senses thin," his vision remains solipsistic and limited, even on his own terms. He approaches Krishna but does not reach the second stage of religious experience, represented in the *Song of the Milkmaidens,* where Krishna multiplies himself for others, extending to each maiden individual contact with the divine.[13]

Dissociated belief and Forster's double vision

Forster certainly found Hindu worship closer to his own values than Christianity, but its proclivity for personal vision and the resultant practical muddle still only amounted to half of religion's promise, solves none of its apparent problems, and gets us no closer to Truth. This is a skeptical

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reading of religious experience, indeed. But in sharp contrast to Sharf's conclusions, *Passage* does not therefore hold that we should deny the reality of religious experience itself or the notion of a transcendent unity. The experience of the caves presents an excess at the center of the novel, rather than a gap. After all, both Mrs. Moore and Adela are touched by something in the caves; the echo, to come back, must bounce off of something. But if Forster rejects Sharf's extreme position—throwing out religious experience because of logical impossibilities—it is equally important to see that he also rejects the other extreme, which would be acceptance of a mystical position in spite of such rational problems.

This second rejection can be illuminated by contrasting competing contemporary views of religious experience: those of William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience* and that of Evelyn Underhill's *Mysticism*. For Undherhill, mysticism is a path to *permanent* mystical union between the individual and the divine. In this permanent state, all apparent logical or epistemological problems are irrelevant, since the apparent contradictions or difficulties that normal consciousness that plague normal consciousness would dissolve (39, 124). Such a state is thus permanently beyond "cross-pressures," immune to skeptical secular contexts of understanding. For James, such permanent experience is attested to, but he insists that one of the critical qualities of mystical experience is its *transiency,* along with its *passivity, ineffability*, and its unique *noetic quality* (James Lecture XVI). Thus although the experience itself is claimed to resolve all apparent contradictions, and also to authorize various meanings, forms, values, or traditions, such claims have no empirically determinable validity. To James, the hermeneutic and epistemological problems inherent in religious experience present themselves as real problems, while to Underhill they are only apparent, resolved by the experience. For Underhill the experiential epistemology of mysticism has the only legitimate claim to knowledge, while for James it confirms something outside the limits of knowledge. James summarizes that his own religious experiences have confirmed that there are

> other forms of consciousness . . . [without which] no account of the universe in its totality can be final. Yet they may determine attitudes though they cannot furnish formulas, and open a region though they fail to give a map. At any rate, they forbid a premature closing of our accounts with reality. . . .In these states

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> it is as if the opposites of the world, whose contradictoriness and conflict make all our difficulties and troubles, were melted into unity. (335)

Of the two perspectives, Forster is of the Jamesian type. The difference is reflected in Forster's conception of the differences between his own religious experiences and those of Edward Carpenter: while the latter had a fully transformational experience in India and subsequently "lived by vision" (*Creator* 292), Forster says that he attained only "a vague *feeling* of peace" (*Selected* 1.185) from his own experiences. But James's unique description of mysticism's "noetic quality"—that it is a state of *feeling* that seems to be a state of knowledge, leaves open the possibility that transcendence can still assert its claim to verify a transcendent reality as a feeling, though it has no determinate intellectual content (James 368).

This does not resolve the complex of issues I've outlined above; rather, it asserts a claim from within the skeptical understanding that Forster explores those issues from. There are moments all over *Passage* where characters have a sense of some ineffable beyond, of that "passage not easy, not now, not here, not to be apprehended except when it is unattainable" (353), which the Hindu festival is a symbol of, but only a symbol. Something beyond meaning, like the "curious backwash" (294) that dwarfs Adela and Ronny's attempts to deny God in their final parting, or the "immense peal of thunder, unaccompanied by lightning" (354), which comes as all crash into the water at the end of the festival in the novel's climactic muddle of pity and love.

If religious experience offers an emotional claim to a higher reality that is definitively beyond any reduction to meaning, and cannot authorize any form, tradition, or action, then ironically we can see a humanist and even pragmatic hope in its appeal. Forster describes the most "successful" of his novel's characters achieving a "double vision," in which they view their own gestures toward transcendence as necessarily flawed from an outside perspective—they see the limitations of their own vision even as they realize they cannot be other than themselves, and see past those limits. The double-vision is "a spiritual muddledom for which no high sounding words can be found; we can neither act nor refrain from action, we can neither ignore nor respect Infinity" (231). We realize that action will force our failure, which "disrespects" the goal of Infinity by bringing it "under the rules of time" (323), giving discursive definition to the ineffable and indefinable. And yet we realize the potential of the originary

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event, and it becomes a space in which we can acknowledge the claim of the Other because we know that they have an equal claim to that space, because an equally invalid one. If we could not see where our vision fails, we would simply exclude the other, or subsume it into our own system (as Godbole does, despite admitting limits). This is religious experience as virtually the opposite of perennialism—a transcendent experience that un-authorizes any possible belief's claim to truth. As Mrs. Moore says, "I think everyone fails, but there are so many kinds of failure" (53).

Disbeliever, unbeliever, non-believer

With regard to matters of belief, questions like "was Forster a mystic?" or "does *Passage* advocate a believing mysticism or secular skepticism?" have thus far prevailed. But what kind of questions does the issue of belief yield for someone like Forster, who, as he says in the opening of "What I Believe," does not believe in belief? Considering such a statement we approach the complexity—perhaps the absurdity—of modern questions of religious engagement that Taylor points to when he suggests that modernity is "not a narrative of unbelief replacing belief, . . . [but] more like a cacophony replacing meaning as such" (522).

When Forster begins "What I Believe" by asserting "I do not believe in belief," I think we ought to take the joke seriously. On the brink of WWII, he was risking his career to come out against the jingoist mentality of the time, famously declaring "I hate the idea of causes, and if I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country" (*Two Cheers* 65-66). The essay is often cited as proof of Forster's skepticism, and thus unbelief, but we need to press our terms a bit. In the speech to the Cambridge humanists alluded to earlier, Forster explained that "by the end of [his] third year [at Cambridge he] disbelieved" as much as he did giving the speech in 1959. He was eighty years old at the time. Some ten years later, G. K. Das asked Forster directly about his position on belief:

> "Mr. Forster, you will be ninety in the New Year . . . do you still regard yourself as an unbeliever?"
>
> "Yes," replied Mr. Forster, "I think I should call myself one."
>
> "Unbeliever?" I repeated.

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> "Yes, perhaps," answered Mr. Forster and halting for a moment corrected himself: "Non-believer perhaps—a better description." "I thought you were inclined to believe in Krishna, Mr. Forster?"
>
> "Not any more than anyone else," Mr. Forster remarked and (somewhat hopefully for me) added: "I like things about Krishna worship."

When it appeared in *The Statesman* (23 September 1968), this interview bore the title "Call Me An Unbeliever: Interview With E. M. Forster." But what do we make of Forster's correction, from unbeliever to non-believer? Unbeliever seems an active and positive position, a belief that the divine does not exist. Non-believer suggests something else; merely that one has no positive belief. I don't want to make too much of semantics, but the exchange stands for me as symbolic of Forster's feelings: that characteristic "perhaps," and the open stance that it signals, to the last.

That Forster "disbelieved" in 1958 (or 1902, or every day in between) seems accurate only in the specific sense that he disbelieved in Christianity. His resistance to a set of beliefs in "What I Believe" parallels his claiming non-belief, rather than an unbelief. Forster found it difficult, indeed thought it ethically wrong, to believe in any*thing*: a deity, a dogma, a tradition, a nation, even a theory of art. For him, "belief" and "faith" thus meant closing oneself off to the plurality of life and of truth, and doing this meant "a stiffening process, a sort of mental starch, which ought to be applied as sparingly as possible" (*Two Cheers* 65). When we speak of Forster and belief, then, we must remember that his non-belief extends not just to Christianity and Krishna but to liberal humanism, science, skepticism, and even belief itself.

Perhaps the best term for Forster is "agnostic," though we need to be careful about how we mean it. T. H. Huxley recounts in his 1889 essay "Agnosticism" (correcting both Christian and secular misuses of the word) that when he came up with the term it was meant as "antithetic to the 'gnostic' of Church history, who professed to know so much about the very things of which I was ignorant" (239). Properly, the term denies the claim that through revelation or initiation certain people are granted access to definite *knowledge*. It is not a denial of hope, faith, or ideals, but

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rather a check that insists a person ought not believe "that his faith is evidence of the objective reality of that in which he trusts" (245). We ought not believe that our beliefs are the Truth or, in other words, we ought not believe in belief. This is a perfect description of Forster's understanding of the hermeneutic and epistemological implications of the religious experience; he denied *gnosis*.

In positive terms, agnosticism is not a creed but a method, as Huxley says, "the essence of which lies in the rigorous application of a single principle . . . that every man should be able to give a reason for the faith that is in him; . . . it is the fundamental axiom of modern science" (245-46). But Forster would no doubt critique Huxley for believing a little too much in science, which he felt to be inadequate to questions about the "ultimate constitution of the universe," as Forster put it to Lorna Wood. If agnosticism is a method of checking beliefs against facts and evidence, for Forster "facts" cannot be trusted more than faith for ascertaining the truth. His biographer, P. M. Furbank, recalls his passionate reply to Josie Darling when she told him to "face facts" about WWI:

> Don't say "face facts" to me, Josie. . . .Everybody keeps saying it just now; but the fact is it's impossible to face facts. They're like the walls of a room, all round you. If you face one wall, you must have your back to the other three. (2.2)

Moreover, Forster *did* have experiential evidence that there was something beyond the reach of science or even his own consciousness, even if he could not verify its reality beyond the emotional trace of that experience, or resolve the experience into a system of meaning. Indeed, as I have suggested, his conception of religious experience may have actually lent strong support to his resistances of interpretable meaning and to the concept of belief. For Forster, mysticism's claims to certainty by revelation rather than reason amounted to a further set of problems, not a solution. But this leaves the *emotional* reality of religious experience that James discusses at length, and the position I call *dissociated belief*.

One possibility would be to concentrate on the emotional content of the experience. Thus the idea of dissociated belief has important implications for literary modernism, positing aesthetics—a space that deals directly with emotion—as an area ripe for exploration of a possible modern religious engagement situated within a broadly secular context. This is *not* to pose art as a secular "surrogate" for a lost religious belief, as has been

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done with Forster (and others from Matthew Arnold forward).[14] Indeed, it reflects an understanding directly opposed to such a term, as the concept of "surrogate" denies precisely the radical shifts in the background of understanding of religious issues I have tried to evince. The term poses art as an emptied religious gesture; it assumes that the potential source of meaning (previously religion, now the secular surrogate) operates within a consistent background of understanding, or, at the very least, it obscures how that background has changed. But the changes in human understanding of experience, meaning, transcendence, etc. implicated in the loss of faith fundamentally altered the context of understanding in which the questions central to belief and unbelief operate. Indeed, they introduced new questions altogether. As such, the idea of replacing what had been lost to modernity is only appropriate for those who never adopted a modern understanding in the first place. In order to avoid simply reversing the problem by exploring the "religious" aspects of modernist literature according to an outmoded sense of the term, we must first change the way we think about religious engagement. Only in this way can we usefully establish a dialogue between modern literary studies and current studies of secularization that might enrich them both.

Notes

1. Malcolm Bradbury has argued in *The Modern British Novel* that Forster was an Edwardian up until around WWI, and then became a modernist, leaving *Passage* as a record of the change (176). Usually, Forster's critical turn is seen as a turn to political practicality over liberalism's blind idealism, a blindness he himself spells out quite clearly in "Three Generations." For the debate about whether or not Forster ought to be considered "modernist" at all, see Brian May, David Medalie (*E. M. Forster's Modernism*), Randall Stevenson, and Elizabeth Langland.

2. Some thirty-five years ago Eugene Webb argued that literary critics were quick to praise Forster's "destructive ironies," but ignored what he calls the "constructive, exploratory side" of Forster's effort—meaning, for Webb, his building of a "sacred cosmos"—and "to avoid embarrassment they will usually do their best to overlook it." Webb singles out David Shusterman and Frederick Crews explicitly. To make his case for a positive sacred vision in *Passage*, Webb does what many later critics have done in arguing that Godbole's vision is the key to unlocking the novel's positive meaning (189, 198-99). Later critics have more often taken Forster's obvious attraction to mysticism head-on,

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but have seen it as subverted by the novel's irony, complexity, pragmatism, etc. G. K. Das's definitive study of Indian contexts for the novel, *E.M. Forster's India* (1977), argues that "the novel is not to be read as a systematic exposition of the Hindu and the Muslim ways of life, or as an account of the author's own formulated opinions on the these two religions; its approach to religions is, in fact, fundamentally realistic: detached, self-conscious, also ironical" (93, 96-108). For other accounts that deny a positive religious position, see Brian May, who argues for pragmatism as defeating mysticism, or Trilling, *E. M. Forster* (44).

3. Das's own pupil Ganguly makes the most thorough case, arguing that though Western readers are likely to see the novel's skepticism as amounting to a final position that is negative, Indian readers (particularly Hindus) are more accustomed to the possibility of incorporating disorder and negation in their theology and thus "what are seen as negatives by Western readers are seen as positives by Eastern ones, and the novel is seen as a long presentation of positive possibilities rather than of disappointing negatives" (16-17). Like subsequent readings, Ganguly's reading hinges on Godbole's vision in Temple as well as the *Song to the Milkmaiden* (Chapter XII). Michael Orange argues that the theme of the failure of representation and the practical limits of vision is overcome in Godbole's vision (156). Doreen D'Cruz similarly argues that the caves represent "Non-being" and that Godbole's vision incorporates their "decreation" into a cyclic "eternal coil" represented by the rebirth of Krishna (193). For Tracy Pinchtman, although the caves emphasize the constructed nature of religious vision, "ultimately, Forster seems sympathetic to the Hindu temperament, which he portrays as more accepting of the metaphysical and existential confusion that frustrates many of the non-Hindu characters of his novel" (62-63). Jeffrey Heath argues that Mrs. Moore constructs a "faulty little narrative" about her religious experience while Professor Godbole accepts the limits of narration and instead opts for a metaphysically superior silence (Forster *Creator* 756).

4. Idealism is easily incorporated into believing accounts of mysticism (see Chapter 1 of Evelyn Underhill's *Mysticism*); only certain variations of humanism—what Charles Taylor calls *exclusive* humanism—outright exclude an open stance toward the transcendent (*Intro* and *Part III*); Romanticism's notion of aesthetic and creative experience is a direct source of the concept of religious experience, as countless artists, mystics, and theorists assert; Jungian psychology entails an "open" immanent stance and is frequently allied with mysticism (see William Parsons, *The Enigma of the Oceanic Feeling*); symbolism, as Baudelaire defines it, is at least half spirit; mythopoeia confronts what religious scholars accept as the standard predicament posed by religious experience, that the experience is unconditioned but the articulation always personal.

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5. When his reading veers from literary analysis toward a definitively theological claim, such as that "the shiver is the trope that encodes apophatic religious tradition into the modernist text" (93), Roeschlein hardly provides adequate theological context or evidence in support. That the trope should be seen as genuine religious apophasis (as opposed to simply the literary trope) would be contingent upon its *already* being situated in a system of negative theology. For Roeschlein, the trope itself seems to function as valid proof that such a religious system is posited in the text. If this were the case, we may as well call any such trope in any text "apophatic." Similarly, you can't cite the presence of the stylistic tropes of accounts of mystical experience as evidence that something is a mystical text—the defining characteristic of such a text is the claim that one has experienced contact with the divine.

6. For a very useful collection of recent debates about this theorization, see *Religion and Modernization* (1992), edited by Steve Bruce. For Bruce's own defense of the secularization thesis, see *God is Dead* (Bruce, however, doesn't oppose secular/rationalist and religious frameworks of understanding; see Chapter 5). For a collection of arguments that modernity has in fact *strengthened*, in certain ways, religious engagement, see Peter L. Berger, ed. *The Desecularization of the World* (2002).

7. For a recent argument that rejects the simple secular/religious binary in the realm of cultural criticism, see Vincent Pecora's *Secularization and Cultural Criticism* (2006). Reading Habermas, Benjamin, Marx, and Durkheim, Pecora argues that theories commonly accepted as secular come "with certain historical and religious strings attached" (2), and thus that much of modern theory central to cultural criticism ought not be considered "secular" in the non-religious sense that it has been in the past.

8. See also Forster's discussion of will and vision in a letter (31 Jan. 1918) to Florence Barger (*Selected* 1.284); his exasperated comment to G. L. Dickinson in a 1922 letter that "even if we try to acquire such opinions as are true, we end by believing them true because we have acquired them" (2.25); his reflections on the religious ecstasy of the Maharajah of Dewas (the model of Godbole's vision during the festival of Gokul Ahstami) in *The Hill of Devi* (115); or his discussion of Hindu experiential worship in "The Temple":

> no one can forget [the experience of the Temple]. It remains in the mind when the fairer types have faded . . . then the Indian Temple exerts its power, and beckons down the absurd or detestable vistas to an exit unknown to the Parthenon. We say "Here is truth," and as soon as we have said the words the exit—if it was one—closes, and we fly back to our old habits again. (*Prince's Tale* 228)

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This lament recalls the description of Godbole's vision falling "under the rules of time" in *Passage* (323).

9. Consider, for instance, the similarities between Fielding's experience of a cave in an early version and Mrs. Moore's experience in the finished novel (*Manuscripts* 267-68).

10. Adela's experience is also recounted, but she yields to Mrs. Moore's authority (214-6). Like Mrs. Moore, Adela's echo goes away when she finds a way (false though it may be) to make sense of it (225-26).

11. The *Manuscripts* also reveal an earlier version where Forster depicts Fielding going into the cave and actually speaking both vileness and poetry. The result is the same, and Forster even saves much of his wording in Mrs. Moore's version (267-68).

12. In a manuscript version it is the symbolic Kawa Dol that utters it is alive, asking the small stones if they are, which answer "yes" (237). This exchange is then echoed by smaller stones as Fielding approaches a cave : "'I am <hot> \ alive/, are you?' and the smaller <announced> \replied/ 'Yes—almost alive'" (265). In the final version Forster keeps only the second set of lines.

13. In his 15 September 1924 letter to Malcolm Darling, Forster frames the failure to achieve this higher stage of vision in terms of the limits of personal relationships: "It seems to me that [in friendships] individuals progress alternately by loneliness and intimacy, and that the legend of the multiplied Krishna . . . serves as a symbol of the state where the two might be combined" (*Selected* 2.124). See *Passage* for Godbole's explanation of the *Song of the Milkmaidens* (85). In it, when Krishna first reveals himself to the milkmaidens, they begin to think themselves superior, so he disappears. They are humbled, and go searching for him. He reappears, but now Krishna is multiplied so that each milkmaiden dances with him simultaneously, each thinking she is his only partner. Unity with the Godhead and particularity are thus both maintained. In a manuscript version, the failure of Godbole is explicit. It fails precisely at the point he contemplates the hope that Krishna would multiply himself and come to others, though "that is what is wanted . . . in society, in politics, in daily life" (512).

14. Wilfred Stone's influential *The Cave and the Mountain* makes Forster the exemplary case of someone for whom art functioned as a surrogate for lost Christianity, though Stone says Forster has another "prose" half for which a mature liberal-humanism is essential (7-9, 20). Theodore Ziolkowski's *Modes of Faith*, a recent full-scale go at the surrogate theory, also makes Forster an example of a modern artist who lost faith and searched for secular surrogates.

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Although he places Forster in his chapter on the "Pilgrimage to India," Zilkowski determines that *Passage* "can in no way be construed as a quest for a surrogate faith" (114-15), since Forster belongs with the poets who sought a surrogate in art.

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"Inhospitable Splendour": Spectacles of Consumer Culture and Race in Wharton's *Summer*

Gary Totten

In her posthumously published essay "A Little Girl's New York" (1937), Edith Wharton refers to her mother, Lucretia Jones, as "a born 'shopper'" (361). The conservatory of the family's Twenty-Third-Street New York home remained "an empty waste, unheated and flowerless, because the money gave out with the furnishing of the billiard-room." Despite her having grown up in this atmosphere of consumerism, however, there is surprisingly little reference to shopping in Wharton's autobiography,[1] though her fiction demonstrates her familiarity with New York's famous shopping districts, where characters like Lily Bart in *The House of Mirth* (1905), Undine Spragg in *The Custom of the Country* (1913), and Pauline Manford in *Twilight Sleep* (1927) hone their skills as consumers. In *The House of Mirth,* consumer culture's negative impact is suggested through Lily's social and physical decline, figured in her displacement from her aunt's Fifth Avenue home to a south side boardinghouse, a route that takes her through "the degradation of a New York street in the last stages of decline from fashion to commerce" (297). Alluding to the literal transition of fashionable neighborhoods into retail districts, this phrase also positions commerce below fashion in a hierarchy of social evolution. But by casting commerce as a lower stage to which fashionable society descends rather than a foundation upon which fashion is built, the phrase obscures the intimate ties between them. As Lily's demise suggests, the social currency of Wharton's women, "born to shop," largely depends upon their obscuring this relationship—living, dressing, and shopping well, but doing so without calling attention to capitalism's role in underwriting their fashionable lives.

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In *Summer* (1917), Wharton dramatizes consumer culture's role in a different class dynamic. A young woman living in the western Massachusetts hamlet of North Dormer, Charity Royall, like Wharton's other women characters, experiences the pressure to consume, but as she comes to understand herself as socially and economically ill-equipped to navigate consumer culture, she suffers heightened anxiety about her identity as a modern consumer. Highlighting Charity Royall's complex subjectivity, *Summer* represents Wharton's ambivalence to consumer culture, indicated, as Nancy Bentley has argued, by her interest in "the sweeping forces of a new economic world" (228) (upon which she relied to promote her work) but also the "persistent anxiety" (229) with which she viewed the impersonal and dangerous power of such forces.

Wharton situates Charity's subjectivity formation both in relation to specific manifestations of consumer and visual culture, such as the shop window display and the cinema, and in light of her concerns about race. Recent studies by Monica Miller, Daphne Brooks, and Grace Elizabeth Hale have increased our understanding of the connections among race, spectacle, and consumption in the early twentieth century.[2] More specifically to Charity's experience, Parley Ann Boswell, Jennie Kassanoff and Elizabeth Ammons all illuminate issues of race, spectacle, and consumption as they operate in *Summer*. Building on their work, I examine how the interrelatedness of race, spectacle, and consumption bear upon the formation of Charity Royall's subjectivity. Represented in relation to what the narrator terms the "inhospitable splendour" (147) of consumer culture and its visual models of normative female behavior and appearance, and in language and imagery belying an anxiety about race, Charity's struggle to reconcile her class, gender, and racial identities with the expectations and effects of a rising consumer culture suggests both the challenges such culture presents for rural woman as well as Wharton's ambivalence about that culture itself.

The shop window and women on display

Charity is originally from the Mountain, a rural community fifteen miles from North Dormer judged to be socially and morally inferior and, described as the "swarthy Mountain" (179), associated with racial other-

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ness. She is the daughter of a man who Lawyer Royall had convicted of manslaughter and of a "half human" (102) mother who willingly gives her up, and at age five, when Charity's father asks him to bring her down from the Mountain and raise her "like a Christian" (101) in North Dormer, she becomes Royall's ward. When Mrs. Royall passes away seven or eight years later, Royall becomes Charity's sole guardian. Charity recognizes that as Mr. Royall's ward, her class status is elevated above that of her Mountain kinfolk. However, her first experiences "look[ing] into shops with plate-glass fronts" (57) and attending an illustrated lecture in the larger and more commercialized town of Nettleton call her attention to North Dormer's limitations and her own lack of social and economic power. While Charity can take in North Dormer's one street with a single glance, Nettleton boasts shops, theaters, and a dedicated business district. Her first trip there produces "a thirst for information," which she satisfies by reading voraciously from the books in the North Dormer library, where she works. It becomes clear that reading is insufficient remedy for Charity's malaise, however, not only because of her limitations as a reader, but also because she requires visual stimulation to keep the limitations of North Dormer in perspective, and her desire for knowledge fades as quickly as her visual impressions of Nettleton.[3]

It is Charity's gaze by which, upon exiting Royall's house as the novel begins, she first assesses Lucius Harney, a newcomer to North Dormer who represents the pleasures and sophistication of city life and instantly revives Charity's "vision of the glittering streets of Nettleton" (59). While Royall has also lived in Nettleton and carries, like Harney, the "air of power" (87) that city experience provides, Charity is sure that Harney has experienced "bigger places" (New York's Fifth Avenue, in fact). When Charity sees Harney, she steps back into the house to check the reflection of her "swarthy" face in a hall mirror, wishing "for the thousandth time that she had blue eyes like Annabel Balch" (56). Charity's comparison of her swarthy features with those of the fair Annabel suggests the classic, and racially inflected, dichotomy. It is significant that Wharton initiates Charity's negotiation of spectacle and consumption within what Toni Morrison would identify as a "sign" or "code" revealing the presence of a racial narrative in an ostensibly raceless text (16), a word such as "swarthy" invoking connections that were being made between evolutionary progress and race, as well as the belief in the Anglo-Saxon origins of

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American culture, and revealing the ways in which, as Elizabeth Ammons notes, Wharton "wrote as a raced writer" ("Edith Wharton" 83) during a period when the "nativist myth of imperiled whiteness" was particularly prevalent in New England ("Myth" 6).

Charity's concerns about her racial profile aggravate her difficult relationship to the gender, class, and consumer identities that she must negotiate. As Charity's affair with Harney develops, her attraction to Nettleton's consumer spectacle increases, particularly during her Fourth of July outing there with Harney, emphasizing the correlation between her sexual awakening and her introduction to the practices of visual and consumer culture and, more broadly, suggesting the ways in which consumer culture both informs and exploits attitudes toward women's sexuality. While the holiday mood "transform[s] Nettleton into a metropolis" (144), and Charity is sure that neither Springfield (Annabel Balch's hometown) nor Boston could boast scenes any more grand, the city is generally regarded as the place to which disgraced women like Julia Hawes flee when they want to escape the scorn of North Dormer. That Charity celebrates her budding passion for Harney in Nettleton's doubtful moral atmosphere, symbolized by the presence of Julia Hawes, an abortion clinic run by a Dr. Merkle, and the town's retail shops, underscores the social pitfalls of the relationship. In particular, Wharton's emphasis on the town's consumer spectacle highlights the precarious association between sexuality and consumerism for women, suggested by the description of Nettleton's shops which, though closed for the Fourth of July, still offer sexually charged "hidden riches" in the display windows:

> In some, waves of silk and ribbon broke over shores of imitation moss from which ravishing hats rose like tropical orchids. In others the pink throats of gramophones opened their giant convolutions . . . and in one vast bay that seemed to project them into exciting contact with the public, wax ladies in daring dresses chatted elegantly, or, with gestures intimate yet blameless, pointed to their pink corsets and transparent hosiery. (144-45)

Sexuality, subjectivity, and shopping intersect dramatically in Charity's glimpse into the public "female territory" of the store, a space, as Susan Benson has shown, intentionally designed to appeal to women (76). Indeed, the gaudy shop window displays and mannequins are not so different from the scene that Charity encounters in Dr. Merkle's abortion clinic later when, after her affair with Harney has developed, she visits the clinic to determine if she is pregnant with his child. During this visit,

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Charity is welcomed by a "mulatto girl with a bushy head" (208) who leads her into a lobby adorned with "large gold-framed photographs of showy young women" arranged like consumer goods in a window display. The contrast between the racialized mulatto girl and the nonracialized (and, presumably, mostly white) women on display—similar perhaps to the fair-haired women in the movie posters Charity sees at the Nettleton cinema—emphasizes how Charity's ambiguous but racialized background makes her an intruder in the generally nonracialized, and thus normatively white, world of consumption. That the shop window mannequins are sheathed in "pink corsets" (145) could also itself be seen as implying the normative whiteness of consumer culture and its artifacts. Like the shop windows, Dr. Merkle's clinic lobby also manifests what the narrator will later refer to as the "inhospitable splendour" (147) of public female display—its simultaneous allure and danger. Like Dr. Merkle's gilded "patients," the wax mannequins in the shop windows stage women as both consumer and consumed, instruct Charity on how to display her sexuality while also reminding her of her non-normative racial status, and point toward the powerful impact that such display can have on passersby, as window designer L. Frank Baum noted (qtd. in Schneider 26), and as Charity's response suggests.

In the Nettleton shop window, Charity is confronted with a vision of the dangers of public display, the figure of the mannequin representing for Wharton, as Jennifer Shepherd sees it, "the tragic aspects of consumer culture and spectacle" (151) for women. Mannequins visually modeled for women consumers "a range of behaviors and roles," William Leach argues, from leisured "indulgence" to domestic duty ("Strategists" 113), and Wharton's mannequins, with their corsets and hosiery, are "project[ed] . . . into exciting contact with the public" (*Summer* 145), literalizing how, as Leach observes, "the female image was gradually thrust out of its older protective cultural shelter" ("Strategists" 113) within domestic space. The shop windows' messages are most immediately embodied in the "showy-looking girls" (146) Charity encounters in a Nettleton restaurant dressing room. Initially, she hesitates to look at her reflection in the dressing-room mirrors because of the other girls' splendor and the lingering vision of the shop dresses, but when she does look, "the glow of her face under her cherry-coloured hat, and the curve of her young shoulders . . . restored her courage," and once she pins on the blue brooch that Harney has bought for her in a Nettleton shop, she walks back to the restaurant "with her head high."

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Charity's appraisal of her looks here is very different from the misgiving she earlier feels glancing at her swarthy features, and her own opinion of her appearance improves as Harney's admiration for her grows. Even before she arrives in Nettleton with Harney, Charity begins to appreciate the rosy glow of her face and, considering the positive effect that her looks seem to have on him, wonders whether "it was a mistake to wish [her eyes] were blue" (79). Seemingly resisting normative standards of white beauty, she even exults in the way that a pink calico dress sets off her "dark tints" (104) and, in an intriguing meditation on how desire might cancel out the problem of blood, asks herself, "What did it matter where she came from, or whose child she was, when love was dancing in her veins?" (105). Nonetheless, she still has reservations about Harney coming in contact with her Mountain kin (106), a quandary reflecting Charity's perpetual insecurity about her racial background. Her growing confidence seems to depend on the validation she receives from Harney and, once they are in Nettleton, on his purchasing of the brooch—a badge of both her desirability and her status as a consumer demonstrating how proper consumption might ameliorate suspected racial taints,—which, Charity understands, she must display publicly in order for it to grant her a social, economic, or racial pass.

Wharton seems to have been uncomfortable with the ramifications of public display and its assault on domestic privacy. As early as 1897 in *The Decoration of Houses*, she and her collaborator, Ogden Codman, Jr., privileged privacy as essential for "civilized life" (22). Wharton disapproved of holding parties in the sixteenth-century French sleeping-chamber, which offered little "refuge from the promiscuity of the hall" (162) (let alone the street, as we see in the Nettleton shop window), but applauded the French for fashioning the bedroom as a private suite of rooms (169-70), and structured her own home, The Mount, according to similar principles of privacy (Fryer 65, 69). Situating it within the context of Wharton's affair with Morton Fullerton, scholarship often sees *Summer* as extending conventions of women's writing through its celebration of sexuality, but the novel also suggests Wharton's misgivings about how the private details of women's lives were being projected into the streets in contrast to the guarded domestic and psychic interiors she privileges in much of her work. Noting the role that mannequins played in this cultural shift, Mannequin designer Lester Gaba claimed that his mannequins produced the impression that the spectator "seem[s] almost to be intruding on their pri-

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vacy" (qtd. in William Leach, "Strategists" 112), an inevitable consequence, perhaps, of the routine display of lingerie and corsets on mannequins by the beginning of World War I and, soon after, the appearance of live underwear models in department store windows (117). *Summer* suggests how consumer culture places women in a difficult position between, on the one hand, consumerist standards of beauty and female display, and, on the other, traditional gendered notions about women's relationship to private and public space.

The scene of the young unmarried Charity captivated by the shop window also points toward the connections between mercantile display and the early twentieth-century marriage market, connections that were pronounced in popular magazine images, like Oliver Herford's illustration accompanying his poem, "The Husband Shop: A Fable for Heiresses," in the October, 1913 *Century*:



THE HUSBAND SHOP

A FABLE FOR HEIRESSES

BY OLIVER HERFORD

Above the plate-glass window-pane,
Inviting every passing gaze,
Hung an inscription, large and plain,
"*THE HUSBAND SHOP.*" This, in amaze,
Clorinda seeing, stopped wide-eyed,
And stared, then turned and stepped inside.

A floor-walker whose faultlessness
And condescending air proclaimed
One of the *table d'haute noblesse*,
Approached Clorinda and exclaimed,
With graceful undulating palm:
"Something in husbands? *Oui, Madame.*"

"We have the latest thing of all
In husbands; kindly step this way.
We 're using them on hats this fall,
In place of plume or floral spray.
The creature being pinned or tied
With chiffon bows on either side."

He leads the way, all wreathed in smiles,
And wonderful in spotless spats
That flitter like twin butterflies
Along an avenue of hats,
Each one displaying on its brim
A husband—fashion's latest whim.

Clorinda tries them each in turn
Before the glass; some are too small,
And some too cold, and some too stern,
And some are slightly soiled, and all,
When punctured by the hat-pin's steel,
Betray by squirms how bored they feel.

At last Clorinda came to one
Marked "*Dobbs*," that scarce seemed worth her while;
But when she tried it on for fun,
It met the hat-pin with a smile,
As if to say, "Oh, beauteous miss,
Even a stab from you is bliss!"

"The very thing! but thrown away
Upon a *hat!*" Clorinda cried.
"'T would make a sweet corsage bouquet."
The shoppers stared quite stupefied
To see Clorinda Dobbs depart
Wearing a husband next her heart.

Fig. 1. Oliver Herford, "The Husband Shop"

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Herford's poem romanticizes the crass economics of the marriage market, in which women were encouraged to wisely shop for husbands as they would for any consumer product (a point that Elizabeth Gruber Garvey also makes [15]). The poem and illustration emphasize that while women might have some power as consumers, they must wield that power in culturally acceptable ways. When Clorinda, the poem's protagonist, finds Dobbs, the man who welcomes the stab of her hat-pin, she decides that he is best worn as a corsage: "The shoppers stared quite stupefied / To see Clorinda Dobbs depart / Wearing a husband next her heart." Clorinda's appraisal of her image in the mirror and her eventual choice of a husband as an appropriate fashion accessory emphasize how, in addition to their ability to consume products, women were often depicted in discourse and visual culture as the objects to be consumed. Another Herford illustration, in the July 1913 *Century* (fig. 2), places marriageable American women behind glass as consumer spectacle for immigrant men, emphasizing women's status as commodities while also drawing upon concerns about the threat of contamination posed by the "other," a concern that the novel also engages in a somewhat revised form in regards to Charity: although Charity stands mesmerized as a potential consumer before the shop window, she is also objectified as a consumable spectacle of otherness, mostly through the workings of her own critical gaze.

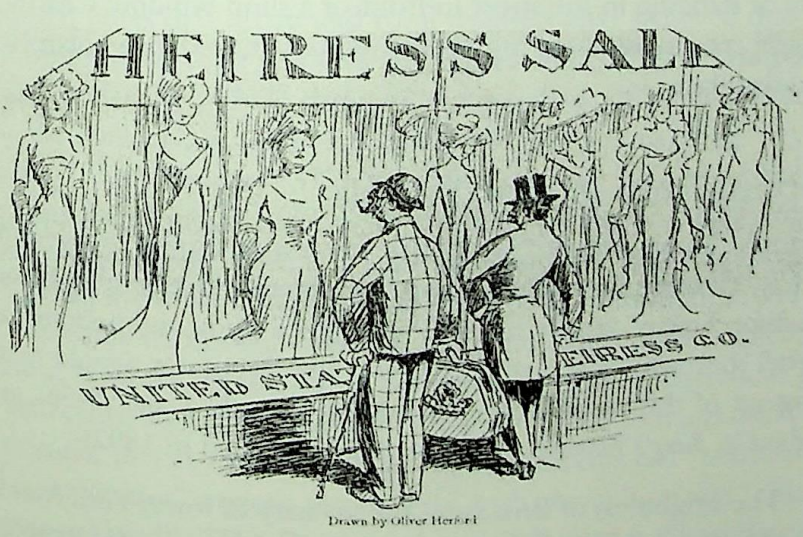


Fig. 2. Oliver Herford, "Foreign Labor"

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This display of women as objects for sale in a consumer market promoted longstanding associations between marriage and prostitution and sexualized women's relationship to public space. Maureen Montgomery notes that society women risked being "misrecognized" (120) as prostitutes when displaying themselves in public, but perhaps more pertinent to Charity's case, Walter Benn Michaels also emphasizes that "the decent working girl" (508) could be mistaken as such. Not long after she steps into Nettleton's streets, Charity encounters various signs warning of the blurred distinctions between the modern prostitute and the decent woman, and the pictures in Dr. Merkle's lobby later confirm what the shop window mannequins only imply about the consequences of public female display. Charity's precarious class position significantly amplifies the social risks of her independent behavior, as the novel bears out; she becomes subject to similar rewards and penalties, as the heiress and society woman, but with less cultural or economic capital to cushion, even if only slightly, society's judgments. Indeed, when she runs into Julia Hawes and Royall at the Fourth of July fireworks, Charity is viewed in public by Royall himself as a "bare-headed whore" (157), or "misrecognized" as such, in Montgomery's terms, the "picture" of herself as "hatless" and "disheveled, with a man's arm about her" in such a conspicuous public setting "fill[ing] her with shame." Caught in the crowd at the fireworks display or standing in the street in front of a shop window, Charity risks the social censure reserved for women who dare to display themselves in the marketplace.

Shopping and its discontents

Wharton's description of Nettleton's consumer displays suggests New York City's famous Ladies' Mile shopping district extending up Broadway to Madison Square, where women both gazed upon and became part of the retail spectacle.[4] Even smaller towns like Nettleton would have felt the impact of this modern merchandising (Leach, *Land* 55-56), as it is described in *King's Handbook of New York*, published in 1892:

> The brightness of Broadway, the vivacity of lower Fifth Avenue, the sparkle of 23d Street, are made up of the splendid temptations of the shop windows, and the groups of charming people who linger about them spell-bound [*sic*]. Ill fares the rural or provincial

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> purse whose owner ventures before these attractive windows . . . a perfect kaleidoscope of silks and velvets, laces and jewels, rich books and music, paintings and statuary, rifles and racquets, confections and amber-like bottles, *cloisonnée* and cut-glass, everything imaginable for use or luxury, massed in perfect affluence, and displayed in the most attractive way possible. (787)

Describing Charity's experience before the Nettleton shop window, Wharton replicates such retail spectacle, throwing Charity's limitations into sharp relief. Without the sophistication of King's New York shoppers, and thrust into a setting that marks her as provincial and unrefined in comparison to other shoppers, she is the owner of that "rural purse" King warns away from the display windows. In 1904, Bertha June Richardson anticipated the effects of such a comparison, noting that in the shop window "women see themselves as they resolve others shall see them, and to some it is a lesson well learned; to others it brings a wrong discontent" (65)—a more gender-specific iteration of Thorstein Veblen's warning that "chronic dissatisfaction" results when individuals compare their "pecuniary strength" against that of others. (31)

Although Charity feels uncertainty within a consumerist context, rural consumption was well established in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America, including western Massachusetts. Thomas J. Schlereth notes that urban and rural dwellers alike believed that "they might demonstrate their gentility and respectability, their cosmopolitanism and modernity" (347) through the purchase of commodities, the mail-order catalogue being a particularly effective way to bring "city ways and wares" to the country (372). In a 1901 essay on New York shopping, Lillie Hamilton French reverses this order of influence, characterizing the urban department store as a later manifestation of the country store (653), perhaps to allay concerns that modernity, urbanization, and consumption erode traditional values. Rural populations often seemed more interested, however, in the status bestowed by urban culture and goods than concerned about the threat such culture posed to tradition. A *Scribner's* editorial in 1914 noted that European fashions had "penetrated to small communities" anxious to compete with city culture and "ris[e] to a higher social level" ("The Point of View" 682), but, as Charity's experience suggests, women's measure of themselves against such yardsticks of commodification often generates the discontent that Richardson observes.

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Discontented in this way, Charity recognizes she is ill-suited for the demands of modern consumer culture and attempts to behave according to its social codes, as embodied in the shop window. But her efforts heighten her self-consciousness about both her class status and racial identity, consumer culture in the novel remaining importantly connected to race. The physical distinctions between Charity and Annabel are read in the novel in terms of what Matthew Frye Jacobson calls a "variegated whiteness" (41) that appeared in popular culture from the 1840s to the 1920s, paralleling the racial distinctions of the Dillingham Commission's Report on Immigration, *A Dictionary of Races or Peoples* (1911), which constructed a racial hierarchy of five key races, linking physical characteristics with morality, character, and intellect in order to restrict citizenship to a narrowly defined segment of the white population. Such distinctions also reflect the eugenics-era racial categories of Madison Grant's influential *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916), which proposed a hierarchy of European populations, the fair-skinned and blue-eyed Nordic race at the top, followed by the darker "subspecies" of Mediterranean and Alpine races, with darker eyes and hair and more "swarthy" skin (20). Charity's swarthy complexion and dark eyes place her decidedly below the fair-haired and blue-eyed Annabel in this racial hierarchy.

That Charity is described as "swarthy" may indicate that Wharton is drawing from stereotypes associated with the Italian immigrants who settled in western Massachusetts at the turn of the twentieth century. Hilda H. Golden notes that by 1900, more than sixty percent of the population near Springfield, for example, was foreign born or children of foreign-born parents (1), with the majority coming from Ireland and French-Canada but with an increasing number of "new immigrants" coming from eastern or southern Europe, including Italy (12). During this period, Italians were not considered white, Rudolph Vecoli argues; one writer, Edward Ross, warned that given the rate of Italian immigration to the United States, there was "no reason why the *Italian dusk* should not in time quench what of the Celto-Teutonic flush lingers in the cheek of the American" (439, emphasis added). Concerns about racial mixing were especially pronounced in relation to those emigrating from southern Italy, who, as Ross's warning demonstrates, some believed were given to violent crime and alcoholism (440) and were intellectually inferior (442). Wharton's description of the Mountain dwellers as a "gang of thieves and outlaws" (100) coincides with these popularly held beliefs about the dubious intellect and character of Italian immigrants.

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Given the number of Irish immigrants who worked on the railroads during the late nineteenth century, Wharton invokes an additional racial narrative by casting the Mountain folk as railroad workers (97). Many Irish immigrants settled in western Massachusetts between 1850 and 1900 (Golden 48; Ammons "Myth" 12), and in minstrel shows and vaudeville acts,[5] the Irish were often stereotyped as congenitally hot-tempered drunkards and brawlers or, in cartoons and illustrations through the 1910s, as Kerry Soper illustrates, were caricatured as "swarthy apes" and deemed racially inferior and "simian-like" (290). By the 1910s, Madison Grant conceded that Irish immigrants to the US were "for the most part" Nordic, and, while they did not "strengthen the nation either morally or intellectually they did not impair its physique" (87), suggesting an evolution in terms of eugenic fitness, though he continued to insist that the first Irish immigrants in the 1840s were of the primitive "Paleolithic" type.[6]

Also contributing to the notion of the Irish as disparaged "other" was the fear, as Alan Kraut argues, that immigrant groups would contaminate the native US population with disease (*Silent* 3-4). This was well-illustrated by the reaction to the 1918 flu epidemic in Norwood, Massachusetts, which newspaper accounts blamed on the "unsanitary living conditions, deficient personal hygiene, and lack of assimilation" among the Irish (Fanning 226). While this particular epidemic occurred just after the publication of Wharton's novel, such stereotypes had existed for decades. Kraut points out, for example, in the 1830s, Irish immigrants living in shanties and tenements near New York's rivers were blamed for the cholera epidemic ("Plagues" 67), a disease associated in the nineteenth century with transgressive sexuality (Rosenberg 114). Such associations may inform Wharton's depiction of the promiscuous Mountain colony and Charity's affair, and anticipate similar connections between disease (malaria) and sexuality in Wharton's 1936 story, "Roman Fever."

That the period's "expansive conception of race" (3), as Jennie Kassanoff has argued, moved beyond mere skin color, provides an important context for reading Wharton's work. And Dale Bauer has helpfully explained Wharton's aversion to eugenics-era arguments, suggesting how *Summer* complicates contemporary racial ideology.[7] However, through Charity's obsession with her physical reflection and Annabel's appearance, and through terminology such as "swarthy," the novel clearly attends to questions of racial phenotype, suggesting Charity's relationship

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to a category of racial otherness and invoking the associations I outline above. This is important because, while Charity's specific racial make-up is uncertain, her physical features clearly remind her of the lowly class standing and undesirable racial profile she shares with her Mountain kin, in contrast to the fair-haired and blue-eyed Annabel Balch's white Nordic racial security, and these concerns fundamentally inform her engagement with consumer culture. The ways Wharton represents Charity's racial ideas about herself reflect fears about immigration's racial and cultural effects, shaping her notion of herself as a consumer and highlighting Wharton's own misgivings about consumer culture.

Charity conflates race and class in her shopping, sustaining both forms of passing through her dress for North Dormer's Old Home Week celebrations. To convince North Dormer, and herself, "that she was worthy of Harney's admiration" (181), Charity pays more than she can afford to adorn herself in the "virgin whiteness" of a China silk dress, and wears a white veil and white satin shoes, more fine than those of Nettleton's shop windows, borrowed from her friend Ally Hawes and presumably handed down to Ally from Annabel Balch. Annabel thus represents a racial and beauty standard surpassing that of the shop window mannequins. Upon learning that Harney and Annabel are engaged, Charity responds violently to the threat of Annabel's superior splendor, ripping the lace blouse that Ally is trimming for Annabel, and exclaiming, "I hate other people's clothes" (205).[8]

The obsessive whiteness of Charity's attire emphasizes her socially inflected attempt to pass for someone of a higher class status; the domestic labor required to care for white clothing meant that it would be impractical for working class women to wear it. Further, the whiteness of her dress suggests an attempt to pass as one of North Dormer's virginal maidens, obscuring her sexual affair with Harney. Thus attired, Charity participates in a "white muslin" (183) procession of young women as part of Old Home Week, a scene representing both the interrelatedness of race, spectacle, and consumption and how definitions of race in particular are performative, depending, as Harry Elam, Jr. asserts, "on the relationship between the seen and unseen, between the visibly marked and unmarked, between the 'real' and the illusionary" (4). The evening ends with Charity fainting at Royall's feet, the result of the overheated room, the accumulated stress, and her pregnancy, but also an indication of the tenuous nature of her social, economic, and racial position and her dependence

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on Royall, who supplies her with the means to pass socioeconomically and racially. Connecting the collapse at the Old Home event and the effects of consumer culture, Charity associates the faces of the crowd in the overheated hall with the pictures that "dance" (190) on the screen in the Nettleton cinema, a consumer space in which Charity undergoes, as Parley Ann Boswell contends, the transformation from "spectator to spectacle" (5).

Further emphasizing both Charity's status as a spectacle and the connections between social acceptance and consumerism, Royall tosses her a ten dollar bill and tells her to "go get yourself a Sunday bonnet that'll make *all the other girls* mad" (99, emphasis added).[9] Affirming her affiliation with "all the other" white North Dormer girls, Royall here encourages her to surpass them in shopping and dressing. He implies that it would be better to stand out socially and economically from this group rather than, as Harney implies, as a racial curiosity because she comes from the Mountain. "You're from the Mountain?" Harney exclaims when Charity discloses her origins. "How curious! I suppose that's why you're so different" (97). As a rural woman with dubious class and racial backgrounds, she is positioned by Harney as a rural curio, suggestive of the exotic artifacts country store owners placed in display cases and windows to attract consumers, including as in Schlereth's account, "stuffed rattlesnakes, queer-shaped eggs, . . . Indian arrowheads, . . . strange root growths, and seemingly every other article of wonderment" (353). Judging by her pleased response to Harney's comment, Charity initially enjoys her position as a queer rural oddity in the metaphorical display case of the country store, but when she overhears Royall tell Harney the story of her origins, she soon realizes what it means to come from the sodden and bestial race of the Mountain (101–102).

Royall implies that through proper consumption Charity can surmount her unfortunate racial background and even outclass the other North Dormer girls—an effect that also accompanies her acquisition of the blue brooch and Harney's designation of it as the "better" choice (146). Consumption's role in bestowing cultural acceptance was apparent at this time among various immigrant groups (Heinze 34), and acquiring certain goods within the United States' "racialized consumer society" represented a fast track to insider status, as "racist connotations" were "impress[ed] on commodities and consumer spaces" (Mullins 18). Particular modes of shopping also acquired such racial implications, and

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contemporary accounts of consumer culture suggest that certain retailing practices and consumer behavior confer a higher order of civilization, evolved from the vigorous bargaining and unseemly haggling of earlier periods to what Lillie Hamilton French called the "one-price system" of Fifth Avenue (650). French's 1901 article on New York shopping aligns this development with the same forces that "lifted the trade and the diplomacy of Anglo-Saxon races above the plane of mere dupery and clever subterfuge" (651), such language suggesting popular stereotypes about the avarice of foreign-born populations, particularly Jews. New York City bargain counters, French notes, allow "opportunities for relapses into primitive impulses, . . . [or] atavisms, . . . which have distinguished certain stages of development in the history of all civilized races." In *Summer*, Charity depends on both Royall and Harney for the means whereby she might evade her own primitive nature.

Charity's concern about her possible primitivism emerges when Royall says that he will force Harney to marry Charity if she wants and "there flitted through her mind the vision of [her Mountain relative] Liff Hyatt's muddy boot coming down on the white bramble-flowers" (134), an image conflating her concerns about race, sexuality, and social standing. In one sense, the white flowers allude to Charity's fragile racial status, which depends upon Royall's social position in North Dormer, and Hyatt's squashing, then, suggests the potential for the racial and social impurities of the Mountain to stamp out Charity's tenuous whiteness. Moreover, as Kathleen Pfeiffer (148) and Pascha Antrece Stevenson (422) suggest, the bloom of Charity's romance is linked to natural imagery, and contemplating the idea of forced marriage, Charity feels as if "something transient and exquisite" which "had flowered in her" was now "trampled to earth" (134). A man's muddy boot stamping out a fragile flower also implies the need to discipline transgressive female sexuality, and the novel clearly implies that sexual license is not a liberty women can afford.

The "inhospitable splendour" of consumerism

Indeed, the issue of what Charity can or cannot afford, socially or economically, remains her principle dilemma. In order to become a truly "respectable consumer," as Neil Harris has observed of Dreiser's Carrie Meeber, a woman must become "a shopper who not only looks but buys" (181), but within socially sanctioned parameters. While we should not, Pfeiffer suggests, "underrate" Charity's "ability to work for money" at

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the town library (146), where she earns a wage of eight dollars a month (Wharton 75), such an amount certainly would not represent a living wage, even for 1917 standards.[10] Her library work, moreover, is linked to her lack of power as a woman: her getting the job depends on Royall's arguing on her behalf, and, as she suggests to Miss Hatchard after an inebriated Royall attempts to enter her bedroom, she needs her wages to get away from him and thus maintain her sexual purity.

While both Royall and Harney can keep Charity from the Mountain and support her consumerism, only Harney can satisfy her sexual desire, and she is most willing to market herself to him, even without a firm commitment that he will provide the domestic frame of marriage that would sanction female consumerism and sexual expression. Charity's journey down this precarious path begins, as I have noted, when she encounters and then seeks to mimic the consumer behavior modeled in the shop window and practiced by the women in Nettleton. One of the earliest instances of this occurs when Harney observes Charity's fascination with the blue brooch in a Nettleton shop and buys it for her. Though she initially fears he might think she expected him to buy her the pin, like other women who scheme to "extract presents from their fellows" (146), Charity places herself on display, checking her reflection in the elegant restaurant dressing room filled with "showy-looking girls" and pinning on the blue brooch, her confidence bolstered by her pleasing image in the dressing-room mirror. During this period, as William Leach argues ("Strategists" 104, 123), the display principles of the shop window also permeated the décor of hotels, restaurants, and movie theaters, and Charity encounters visual messages similar to those of the shop window when she enters other public spaces in Nettleton. By imitating the behavior of the female consumer, and accepting the implications of Harney's gift, she establishes herself as both consumer and consumed and immediately begins to notice and compare herself to the women around her. Uncomfortable, or, to use Bertha Richardson's term, "discontent" in her role as commodity (65), she grows anxious to leave the "inhospitable splendour" of the restaurant with its "bewitching" and "haughty" waitresses (Wharton, *Summer* 147) against whom she measures her own appearance and self worth.[11]

Earlier, Charity performs a particularly revealing measure of her value against the material splendor of Annabel Balch. When she overhears the clergyman, Mr. Miles, casually remark to Harney that he has recently

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seen Annabel looking lovely at a garden party, Charity relies on her first brief glimpses of Nettleton's "flower-edged lawns" (118) and recollections of Annabel's dress when she visits North Dormer to imagine, painfully, Annabel in all her "splendour" at such a gathering. Wharton similarly deployed the term "splendour" to dramatize Lily Bart's social value in *The House of Mirth,* where Lily's "naturally lively taste for splendour" (27) becomes at best a burden, as she comes to view herself as "a mere pensioner on the splendour" (23) which she had once possessed, and at worst an omen of her impending social decline, when she finds herself immersed in the "torrid splendour" (213) of Mrs. Hatch and her set. But while Lily's own undeniable splendor sustains her for much of the novel, Charity feels herself lacking, an anxiety compounded when she imagines that Mr. Miles must have seen Annabel at the precise moment when Charity and Harney were sitting "in the Hyatt's hovel," to which Charity had brought Harney to sketch, "between a drunkard and a half-witted old woman" (118), a contrast that reflects Charity's sense of socioeconomic and racial inferiority. Because for Charity, Annabel represents the pinnacle of racial and social superiority expressed by her physical appearance (blue eyes and fair features) and material finery (the white shoes that rival Nettleton's consumer products), her splendor becomes the visual yardstick against which Charity unsuccessfully contends.

Having entered the cultural system of spectacle and exchange manifest in the splendor of Nettleton's streets, and most threateningly embodied in Annabel, Charity inevitably experiences its destabilizing effects. At the "glittering palace" of the cinema in Nettleton, she finds it difficult to distinguish between spectacle and reality—"everything she saw seemed to glitter . . . and the crowd around her . . . became part of the spectacle, and danced on the screen with the rest" (148-49)—and she experiences the blurring of distinction between internal sensation and external signs Jonathan Crary (24) and Parley Ann Boswell (5) associate with technologies such as the cinema. Charity comes to rely upon the external signs of consumer culture to define and appraise her self, the psychological (internal) sensations of such a process growing indistinguishable from the external spectacles around her, and the contours of her self become increasingly hard to distinguish from consumer culture as she incorporates its behaviors and messages. Paradoxically, this blurring of identity in relation to external spectacle occurs in a theater, a space that for some

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represented not a blurring but a clarifying of identity, especially in relation to class. One contemporary commentator noted that the "sharply drawn" distinctions between proletariat audiences at a movie theater and the more bourgeoisie audience of a dramatic arts theater, contributed to the country's increasing "class-consciousness" (Eaton 51). A town the size of Nettleton would likely house both types of theaters (and audiences), and the more proletarian setting of Charity's experience in a movie theater emphasizes her tenuous class position: as it becomes more difficult for her to distinguish an autonomous self from the surrounding consumer and visual culture, her low socioeconomic status, particularly in relation to Annabel, becomes even more apparent. Further, Charity's passive absorption in the movie theater resembles her trance-like engagement with the Nettleton shop windows more than what she would have experienced at a live theater, where, as Boswell notes, she might have more actively observed both her fellow audience members and the drama on stage (10). As John Belton contends, the cinema "not only gave audiences an experience to consume, but also functioned as a display window for other mass-produced goods" (7), illuminating the parallel in the novel between the cinema screen and the shop window.

As both observer and observed in this acquisitive environment, Charity encounters visual signs of the limited cultural positions available to women in the early twentieth century, limitations against which she rebels. Probably foremost is her understanding of what it means to have and be seen with a city suitor such as Harney and the ways her relationship with such a man challenges the ideological landscape of North Dormer. Additionally, her fearful glance at the abortionist's sign advertising "Private Consultations" and her shameful encounter with Julia Hawes and Mr. Royall after the fireworks suggest that although Charity's embarking on a sexual relationship with Harney involves a risk, she is willing to rebel against convention. For Boswell, describing the cinema as a chaotic spectacle points toward the chaos of Charity's life as she shifts from "passive spectator to active spectacle" (6) at the fireworks show and during the Old Home Week procession. Nonetheless, Charity places herself in direct opposition to the ideology of the Old Home Week celebration. Charity knows that she "rule[s] in lawyer Royall's house" (67), yet she seeks to use her power in ways not readily sanctioned by her rural community; after Royall's sexual advances, Charity expresses her desire to get away

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and earn a living, and he proposes marriage (74). Rejecting this offer, Charity attempts to establish her economic and sexual freedom outside of Royall's house through her job at the library and, ultimately, through her affair with Harney, the implications of which she symbolically accepts when she accepts the brooch. Charity thus applies the logic of consumer culture by asserting herself economically and sexually, though she fails to understand that the legitimacy of such actions depends upon a suitable domestic frame. She rejects what Victoria de Grazia terms the "new domestic ideologies" of the "modern consumer household" (151). Rather than be content with the culturally-sanctioned role of "Mrs. Consumer" (153) in Royall's house, Charity asserts her right to move outside that sphere.[12]

Living with consumerism, challenging domesticity

Attempting to operate outside domestic space, Charity interprets the tension she experiences between traditional feminine roles and consumer culture in relation to the architectural facades and domestic interiors that she encounters.[13] When Charity first meets Harney, her insecurities about her race, class, and intellect conjure a "vision of vague metropolises, shining super-Nettletons, where girls in better clothes than Belle Balch's talked fluently of architecture to young men with hands like Lucius Harney's" (78). She eventually follows Harney on his architectural sketching tours, but her precarious position as his lover is revealed in the architectural structures she sees, representing a variety of domestic realities, none of which prove tenable for Charity. She recognizes North Dormer's social structure and, by extension, Royall's red house situated prominently at the end of North Dormer's one street as "the established order of things" within which there is "no *place* for her individual adventure" (216, emphasis added).

Finding Charity and Harney in the orchard shack where they have been secretly meeting, Royall draws a parallel between it and the nature of their relationship,[14] implying that their illicit love poses a threat to a domestic ideal: "Is this the *home* you propose to bring her to when you get married?" (196, emphasis added), he demands of Harney. When Charity takes Harney to visit the Hyatt's brown house on the Mountain, the "miserable" interior and "sodden," "bestial" faces of its occupants (108)

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eclipse the quaint exterior design elements that Harney sketches. Charity compares the dismal place to the "freshness, purity and fragrance" of Miss Hatchard's maidenly home and the cleanliness and décor of Royall's house "that now seemed the very symbol of household order" (110) and Anglo-Saxon racial security, registering the difference in character, social standing, and race between Royall or Miss Hatchard and the uncultivated Mountain folk. In the face of this comparison, her "every instinct and habit" rebel against the idea that she comes from these "poor swamp-people living like vermin in their lair" (110).

While Charity may have developed civilized habits in the supposed light and purity of North Dormer, the novel emphasizes the naturalistic forces at work against her, the hereditary legacy of the dark Mountain. Once pregnant, she instinctually seeks a home beyond the "harsh code of the village" (219), returning to the Mountain. She knows the fate of the North Dormer girl who marries "to make things right" (216) and, echoing her concerns about her facial appearance compromising her ability to pass racially, she fears that long before her pregnancy becomes visible, "her face would betray her" (217). Charity finds herself in a house on the Mountain "hardly more than [a] shed" (224) staring at her dead mother's "vile body" (231) and face in which "there was no sign . . . of anything human: she lay there like a dead dog in a ditch" (227). That night, "trying to think herself" (234) into a life on the Mountain, Charity lies in the corner of a slovenly hovel contemplating its dirt and entertaining "vague thoughts of Nettleton" (235). It is not Nettleton's consumer spectacles of jewelry and corsets that haunt her now, though, but the more menacing spectacle of bodies on sale. Earlier, in the Nettleton abortion clinic, she had recoiled at its connections to the sex industry, its display of showy women and the sinister insinuations behind Dr. Merkle's false hair, teeth, and "murderous smile" (209), because at that point she had allowed herself to picture a life of white domestic bliss as Harney's wife. After discovering she was pregnant, it had been even easier to imagine herself as his wife, as she supposed that the "sovereign right" of her condition eclipsed the "sentimental fancy" of Annabel Balch's claim (211). However, lying in the dirty shack, amid evidence of a life on the Mountain, she imagines finding a "quiet place" (235) in Nettleton to have her baby, and decent people to give it to, while she goes out "like Julia Hawes," and like her own mother who was a "woman of the town from Nettleton" (196), to earn a living

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for herself and her baby through prostitution. Amidst the physical, social, and racial darkness of the Mountain, the disgrace of prostitution seems preferable if it will sustain Charity's vision of her baby properly "cleaned and combed and rosy" (235).

Charity's image of her child clean and cared for draws upon both public health and race concerns of the period. Popular stereotypes about the dirt and disease of the "other" were frequently emphasized in contemporary discourse and print culture,[15] but as disease was coupled with racial and ethnic others, cleanliness, purity, and health were also linked to consumerist images of whiteness in popular advertising. As the "new science . . . of public health" (Whipple 630) dramatically increased life expectancy and lowered the death rate (Barry 31), science and the culture at large became increasingly aware of the connections between child hygiene and mortality rates, an issue discussed at length in popular women's magazines such as *The Delineator*, which ran a series of articles in 1917 urging mothers to save their children's lives through proper hygiene and germ control. Many of the normative images of cleanliness and purity in these magazines, associated with products ranging from soap and facial cream to baking powder, shortening, and baby food, not only were designed to appeal to white consumers but also suggested connections between the product's effectiveness and images of whiteness, promising purity, wholesomeness, and even an intensified whiteness through the product's purchase and use. A Stillman's Freckle Cream ad asks, "Wouldst Thou Be Fair?" (fig. 3), Crème Elcaya promises a "soft white" complexion (fig. 4), and a Fairy Soap ad notes that it "is as pure as its whiteness suggests." Such associations reflect, as Paul Mullins argues, an attempt to "materialize White supremacy" (18) by way of consumer culture.[16]

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Fig. 3. Stillman's Freckle Cream Advertisement

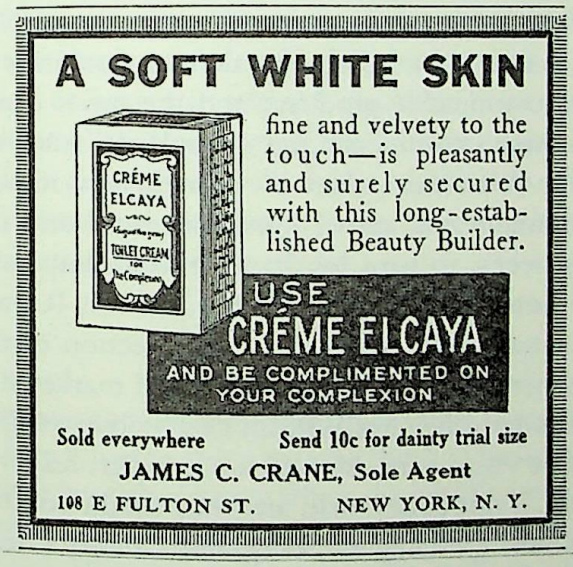


Fig. 4. Créme Elcaya Advertisement

In this context, perhaps it is no surprise that when Royall comes to the Mountain to again rescue Charity, and suggests that they marry, Charity settles for the economic, social, and racial security he offers her within his clean and orderly house.

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However, Charity's acquiescence to Royall's proposal means neither that she simply adopts the traditional role assigned her nor that Wharton views her fate as desirable. After the wedding, Royall gives her money to buy some new clothes, but Charity uses the money to retrieve her blue brooch, which she had left as a guarantee of payment for her consultation with Dr. Merkle. Charity regards the brooch as her "only treasure," a "talisman" which gives her strength (253), the material link between her child and Harney, and perhaps most importantly, a symbol of her desirability and physical evidence of her sexual explorations outside the sanction of marriage. That she uses Royall's money to buy back this marker of an earlier independence reveals its importance to her, but, in a more negative sense, it also emphasizes her inability to successfully operate outside of a domestic sphere as a consumer or as a woman. Charity's dilemma thus constitutes one of the novel's most provocative representations of the power of cultural ideologies in the early twentieth century.

Fashioning subjectivity

Like her wealthier literary sisters in the Wharton canon, Charity is always already "born to shop" in a culture that defines women as both perpetual consumers and consumable products, and the novel explores the close connections between commerce and the subjectivities it "fashions," attending to how consumer culture's contradictory imperatives impact women's economic status, sexual lives, and social and racial identities. Charity almost seems to turn her back on such imperatives when she returns to the hotel without new clothes and tells Royall that she will settle for homemade ones, suggesting her rejection of the materialism represented by her Old Home Week dress and marketed by Nettleton's shop windows and mannequins. William Leach observes that "mannequins provided the first visual persuasion to women that ready-to-wear clothing was as good, if not better, than any they might construct from dress materials at home" ("Strategists" 112), and Charity's decision to make her own clothes might signal a retreat from such consumerist messages toward traditional domestic values. Indeed, Cynthia Griffin Wolff suggests that Wharton's war front experience allowed her to view "tradition as the preserver of life" rather than a repressive force (267), a view Wolff identifies in the novel's conclusion when Charity enters Royall's house "out of choice, with the knowledge of maturity to guide her" (292). However,

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while this renunciation might appear to suggest that Charity resists consumer culture and embraces tradition, she clearly does not forsake the processes of subjectivity formation defined by consumerism and spectacle, upon which she has now learned to rely. While Charity declines to buy new clothes after her marriage, she does not forsake fashion. In buying back the brooch, she identifies with what has "fashioned" her, something Harney had defined as beautiful, "better" (145) than the other jewelry in the display case, and then bestowed upon her. Though she most likely will not be able to display the brooch publicly, for Charity, the brooch is a more important "fashion" statement than the new clothes Royall offers. Indeed, the brooch represents her desirability, acceptability, and independence, even though its power derives from its meaning within consumer culture—which compromises her independence—and the social and racial sanction that this culture symbolically, but capriciously, grants her. Ultimately, the blue brooch thus serves as token of Charity's complicated subjectivity as determined by race, spectacle, and consumption—the emblem binding Charity to consumer culture's inhospitable splendor.

Wharton's own relationship to the cultural standardization promoted by the racial ideologies and consumer culture at play in *Summer* would later become increasingly complex. In the postwar years, Kassanoff notes, her incorporation of American popular discourse helped produce in her work a "hybrid force" that countered the "limiting hauteur of her message" (7), and it is precisely this evolving relationship with modernity that animates *Summer* and recommends her later novels, some critically ignored, to our further critical attention.

Notes

1. A significant reference to shopping does occur in the opening of *A Backward Glance* (1934), where Wharton claims that the "birth of her identity" (1) dates from an outing with her father during which she became aware of the importance of consumption and spectacle. She recalls her dress on that occasion with great detail and writes that on the outing she "woke to the importance of dress, and of herself as a subject for adornment" (2). See chapter one of Katherine Joslin's *Edith Wharton and the Making of Fashion* (2009) for further discussion of Wharton's relationship to fashion.

2. Miller explores black dandyism, Brooks examines racial performativity in the work of transatlantic activists and entertainers, and Hale discusses the relationship between segregation and definitions of whiteness in the South.

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3. Jean Frantz Blackall notes Charity's lack of facility with language (115) and that Charity's sensuous responses to her experiences take "tactile, olfactory, aural, [and] visual" form (117).

4. Nancy R. Leach observes that "slips in detail" in much of Wharton's New English fiction suggest the setting of New York or Newport rather than rural New England (91-92).

5. See, for example, "A Wake in Hell's Kitchen" (c. 1900), a short film of a New York City Irish wake, which adopts the stereotype of the Irish as drunks and brawlers for comic effect.

6. Matthew Frye Jacobson remarks that Grant's views might seem extreme until we consider the other Americans who shared them: "Theodore Roosevelt, Calvin Coolidge, Edward A. Ross, Frederick Jackson Turner, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman" (88).

7. While Bauer does not wish to excuse Wharton's "reprehensible stand on race" (52), she too easily categorizes Wharton's references to race and ethnicity as "'throwaway' comments" intended to depict the "colloquialisms" of the period (61). Kassanoff argues that racial binaries of skin color have received undue attention in Wharton criticism. However, the novel clearly engages contemporary discourses about the physical attributes of race, which impact representations of consumer culture in the novel.

8. See Meredith Goldsmith for a discussion of this scene as part of a series of encounters that emphasize Charity's antagonistic homosocial relationships in the novel.

9. Walter Benn Michaels examines how the passing of this ten dollars from Harney to Royall (as payment for board and transportation) complicates Charity's relationship to systems and acts of economic exchange, specifically gifts and payments (504).

10. Irene Osgood Andrews notes that in 1912, Massachusetts "established the principle of determining a minimum wage for women and children" and various state commissions were created in 1913 to address working conditions (2058). Initially, the minimum wage was not standardized but was generally determined by representatives of employers, employees, and the public (2059). Charity's monthly salary resembles a livable *weekly* wage if we compare it to that decided upon in 1913 by the Oregon Commission, the first to reach such an agreement, which determined minimum weekly wages of $8.64 for adult manufacturing workers and $9.25 for non-apprentice adult female clerks (2062).

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11. Charity's comparison recalls that of Dreiser's Carrie Meeber, who, as another single female newcomer to the city, similarly measures herself materially against New York's shopgirls and finds herself wanting in splendor and refinement.

12. Evidence of the cultural attitudes sanctioning women's economic expression only within the context of marriage can be found in a 1917 *Delineator* magazine writing contest about women's economic independence ("How Would You Solve It?"). The first place winner notes that she entered the work force when her duties as a wife and mother became an unbearable drudgery. She hired an older woman to take care of her domestic duties and found more time for her own leisure and to plan activities for her children and husband. The second place winner resumed her career as a business woman when her husband became ill, but when he recovered, he threatened divorce if she did not give up her career and devote herself to home and family. The experience taught her that motherhood and wifehood "meant unselfishness, sacrifice, devotion, love. . . . I resolved I would be a loving wife and a devoted mother rather than a successful business woman, for no woman can be both." In both cases women's economic and social success is dependent upon or secondary to a domestic framework which includes marriage. These cultural attitudes prove fatal for Charity, who, until the end of the novel, lacks a marriage to sanction her consumer behavior.

13. Wharton identified connections between architecture and human nature in her review of Geoffrey Scott's *The Architecture of Humanism* (1914), in which Scott argued that "we look at a building and 'transcribe ourselves into terms of architecture,'" investing architecture with human "functions," "movements," and "moods" (qtd. in Wharton, Rev. of *The Architecture of Humanism*).

14. Kassanoff suggests that as a result of the bombed out and roofless houses that Wharton saw on the battle front in France (6), "the shattered privacy of the roofless house came to epitomize war's uncanny havoc" (7) and *Summer* reveals Wharton's effort to "restore . . . America itself" to the conservatism of "the racially homogenous 'old home.'" Royall voices such conservatism upon finding Charity and Harney in the orchard shack. This lover's house also alludes to the abandoned house in Wharton's later poem "Ame Close" (a soul enclosed or shut up) from the Love Diary: "My soul is like a house that dwellers nigh / Can see no light in" (Price and McBride 672). This bleak image of female subjectivity emphasizes Wharton's desire to shield passion from outside viewers but also implies concerns about the potentially nullifying effects of a private consuming passion, which, in the imagery of the poem, threatens to extinguish the light of personality altogether.

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15. For example, in 1916, Burton J. Hendrick noted that US concepts of hygiene and public health transformed conditions in the Philippines, despite prevailing attitudes linking disease with the Orient (717). Hendricks sustains the stereotypes supporting this link by characterizing Filipinos as superstitious, barbaric, and exotic (see also Warwick Anderson on how these connections facilitated American colonialism in the Philippines). In 1913, Richard Barry drew similar conclusions about European immigrants, linking them with New York City's sanitation and health problems (32).

16. As Anne McClintock argues, advertisements for soap and other products also reflected racist and imperialist ideologies during the nineteenth century.

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Rita Dove's Poetic Expeditions

Reena Sastri

Rita Dove has consistently refused what she sees as the limitations of a primarily identitarian practice with respect to theme, idiom, or stance; as she puts it in one interview, "it's so ass-backwards to say that there is a Black way of writing and then there is a white" (*Conversations* 158).[1] In Dove's early work, poems in the voices of antebellum slaves sit alongside those that are (in her phrase from another context) "blessedly color-blind" ("Letter" 248), and the book-length sequence *Thomas and Beulah* offers the perspectives of both men and women.[2] But while critics have celebrated the way the former US Poet Laureate's work crosses cultural boundaries, such discussions of crossing have tended to remain within the sociohistorical realm.[3] In Dove's poetry, however, and in lyric as a genre, the "I" not only crosses social boundaries, but exceeds their sphere. Indeed, recognizing that the lyric self consists in part in the impulse to exceed, Dove offers simultaneously gendered and racially marked speakers, and the undoing, or exceeding, of such selves. Her restless "I" locates itself not in terms of an essential African-American or female identity, but in the undertaking of cognitive, imaginative expeditions no less free for originating in the grounds of embodiment and the social. Dove mobilizes the resources of poetry—compression, play of syntax against lineation, aurality, and the unfolding of the poem in time—in order to put the "I" in motion. This "I" is unsettled further by the ghosts of the poetic past, a haunting revealed both as willed by the poet adopting literary lineages, and as received by the writer open to the otherness of the creative process. Gesturing by these means outward from the embodied sociohistorical self, she anticipates recent work on the way the poetic "I," in its resistance to stable self-definition, can offer a politically salutary alternative to politicized identity.

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Poet and philosopher Denise Riley articulates a connection between the otherness of literary invention—the sense many writers report that creativity operates at least partially outside their control, visiting (like the traditional muse) from without—and the depersonalization required, in her view, for political efficacy. Evoking Wallace Stevens's *Adagia*—"When the mind is like a hall in which thought is a voice speaking, the voice is always that of someone else" (67)—Riley elaborates the complex status of the writer's "I," particularly when the self is the subject, as it recognizes its own otherness: "when I write 'I' and follow up the pronoun with a self-description, feelings of fraud grip me" (59). Because it seems both to offer and to demand accurate, stable self-definition through identification with a particular cultural group, Riley sees politicized identity as problematic, and sees greater political potential in more provisional identifications: "A lack of fit between my self-description as a social subject and my presence as a political subject is not disappointing but benevolent, insofar as the subject of political language actually requires a certain impersonality or a non-identity, to be able to circulate productively at all" (5). Although it may aim to encourage recognition of otherness, by excluding a productive uncertainty of self-definition politicized identity limits possibilities, especially when it looks to the past rather than to the future. Here, Riley draws on political theorist Wendy Brown: "Politicized identity," Brown writes, "makes claims for itself only by entrenching, restating, dramatizing, and inscribing pain in politics; it can hold out no future—for itself or for others—that triumphs over this pain" (74). For this reason, the "loss of historical direction, and with it the loss of futurity characteristic of the late modern age" is "refigured" in "the dominant political expression of the age: identity politics."

Such tension between past and future is at stake in Werner Sollors's earlier analysis of American national self-definition. For Sollors, models of nationhood based on descent, emphasizing "our positions as heirs, our hereditary qualities, liabilities, and entitlements," contend with those based on consent, stressing "our abilities as mature free agents . . . to choose our spouses, our destinies, our political systems" (6).[4] Negotiating a similar tension between responsibility to history and a desire for freedom from determination, Dove's poetic expeditions (also, etymologically, freeings, as we'll see)—vividly enact versions of the self and its agency by specifically poetic means, entering into dialogue with ideals of lyric freedom. Although Emerson's declaration in "The Poet" that "poets are liberating

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gods. They are free, and they make us free" (462) may strike us as mystification or fantasy, the association of lyric with freedom has proven resilient and remains suggestive. Theodor Adorno described lyric as "that sphere of expression whose very essence lies in either not acknowledging the power of socialization or overcoming it," as "anticipat[ing], spiritually, a situation in which no false universality, that is, nothing profoundly particular, continues to fetter what is other than itself, the human" (343); for Adorno, it is precisely in this ideal of freedom from the social that lyric shows itself as socially and historically situated and shaped. Recent critics of lyric frequently return to Adorno, as when Deborah Nelson writes,

> lyric is the form in which we witness the exhilaration—and perhaps also the terror—of autonomy and self sovereignty. Unlike the novel, which is polyvalent and social, the lyric is the aesthetic and ideological form in which a speaker conveys the experience and/or the fantasy of his or her own privacy and unfettered self-creation. (xvi)

Not mere fantasy, such self-creation remains, for Dove, a meaningful ideal.

For poet Reginald Shepherd, self-definition as "a black writer . . . a gay writer" amounts to "a form of self-imprisonment, neglecting or even negating the possibilities poetry offers not just of being someone else, . . . but of being no one at all, of existing, however contingently, outside the shackles of identity and definition"(41). Poetry, "less bound by social circumstance than, say, the novel" (44), offered Shepherd, growing up poor in the Bronx, in "a nation defined by racial difference," an occasion to "experienc[e] true freedom" (51). Shepherd's poetry—myth-saturated, dense, by turns experimental and lush—explores such freedom in modes often disengaged from a lyric "I"; Dove, by contrast, seeks to invest the first person with such freedom. When her "I" is recognizably a version of the poet, the pull toward quotidian detail and personal history, on the one hand, contends with the lyric impulse to flight, on the other, to join a seemingly confessional nakedness with an Emersonian transparency, producing a complex staging. Her autobiographical poems evoke the "sense" she describes of feeling at once "alive in our own skin, and at the same time . . . completely insubstantial" (*Conversations* 167). Enacting desired freedom, Dove's "I" consists in a restless mobility, a movement both intentional and contingent.

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In her deliberately unfashionable introduction to her 1995 collection of essays, *Soul Says,* Helen Vendler asserts that the lyric "I" transcends social identity markers, representing the self "when its socially constructed characteristics (race, class, color, gender, sexuality) are felt to be in abeyance" (7). While "the novel is the gesture of the historical and of the spatial," lyric "is the gesture of immortality and freedom" (5). Such a stance might seem to deny the necessarily political, as might the Emersonian sublime to which it bears a relation.[5] Yet we might instead understand this view of the lyric as defining a space to reimagine these "socially constructed characteristics" on more flexible terms. This might be particularly true of "race," an especially vexed and historically fraught concept that defines meaningful divisions between groups of people characterized in terms that have shifted uneasily between the biological and the cultural.[6] Discussing writers, Dove largely rejects terms such as "Afrocentric or Eurocentric" as

> the province of frightened people who need to put things into categories in order to know who and where they are. Politically, they're calculated to pit groups against one another; linguistically, they preclude open thought. . . . I'm in favor of nothing that walls out knowledge in the name of purity." (*Conversations* 133)

We might see lyric as a sphere in which to imagine something beyond such divisiveness, to experience the self's multiplicity, heterogeneity, and flexibility. More broadly, we can identify in lyric's private, aesthetic gestures a paradigm of agency, by attending, in Charles Altieri's words, to "how the poem structures the course of a feeling, understands its artistic coherence as testimony to specific mental and aesthetic powers, [and] makes its claim on the attention of the audience an emblem of how an author can represent choices as worthwhile, as worthy of attention and respect from a community" (7–8). Alternatively, a poem's engagement with multiple literary and cultural heritages can manifest the hybridity that, for Nathaniel Mackey, characterizes "culture, collective poesis, generally," reflecting the "cross-cultural mix that the planet is" ("Cante Moro" 71; "Interview" 324).[7]

In order to articulate specifically how Dove's poems enact lyric mobility and improvisation, I would like to borrow and revise Vendler's term "gesture."[8] Indicating movement, intention, and performance, "gesture" evokes the performative aspect of the lyric "I," the staging of its powers.

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The *American Heritage Dictionary* tells us a gesture is "a motion of the limbs or body made to express or help express thought or to emphasize speech," but also "an act of moving the limbs or body as an expression of thought or emphasis"; and "an act or a remark made as a formality or as a sign of intention or attitude." Both act and intention—an act of intention as movement that is temporal, directional, and performative—"gesture" involves both dancer and dance; both implicated body and soaring mind. In the pages that follow, I examine the gestures by which Dove's poems enact their freedom, gestures whose fidelity to history and the body do not preclude breathtakingly confident flights. These gestures evolve across her career: stances of Emersonian transcendence; expeditions originating in the particularized, embodied self but soaring outward; evasions of fixed identity through syntactic agility; virtuosic performances of music and dance, conjuring flight and expanding our sense of the possible. Through such extremes Dove enacts our desire for freedom, and our capacity for transformation.

§

In Dove's earliest work, gestures are the emphatically vertical: the restlessness cannot be contained within the horizontal, temporal planes of the sociohistorical. In *The Yellow House on the Corner* (1980), "Geometry" imagines a relation to the infinite that recalls Dickinson and Emerson:

> I prove a theorem and the house expands:
> the windows jerk free to hover near the ceiling,
> the ceiling floats away with a sigh.
>
> As the walls clear themselves of everything
> but transparency, the scent of carnations
> leaves with them. I am out in the open
>
> and above the windows have hinged into butterflies,
> sunlight glinting where they've intersected.
> They are going to some point true and unproven.
>
> (*Selected Poems* 17)

As the carnations dissolve into transparency, the poem's "I" becomes an eye—Emerson's transparent eyeball—dispersed in air.[9] We might think

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of the unknown "point true and unproven," where the butterflies go as the destination of lyric itself; as lyric's destination. Calling that place "true and unproven" might seem to suggest a poetic truth as distinct from scientific, but in the poem, the mind's capacity for mathematical thought, and its different capacity for metaphor, intersect, the hinge between them becoming a butterfly. That intersection opens up the poem's unproven territority.

In other early poems, flight lifts off from language, particularly from encounters with foreign languages, provoking a Benjaminian sense of the foreignness of language itself. In "Reading Hölderlin on the Patio with the Aid of a Dictionary," from *Museum*,

> The meaning that surfaces
>
> comes to me aslant and
> I go to meet it, stepping
> out of my body
> word for word, until I am
>
> everything at once: the perfume
> of the world in which
> I go under,
> a skindiver
> remembering air. (*Selected Poems* 88)

In "Ö," from *The Yellow House on the Corner*, "One word of Swedish"—the title word, meaning "island"—"has changed the whole neighborhood," making the yellow house appear as suddenly mobile, "a galleon stranded in flowers," liable at any moment to take "off over the marshland," and opening up possibilities for unpredictable change:

> You start out with one thing, end
> up with another, and nothing's
> like it used to be, not even the future. (*Selected Poems* 64)

Both "Reading Hölderlin" and "Ö" retain a greater sense of embodiment than "Geometry": the former puts the body's response to air and water in tension with leaving the body behind, while the latter emphasizes the pronunciation of its title: "Shape the lips to an o, say a." Yet this embodiment is far removed from the so-called confessional; more par-

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ticularized than the Emersonian eye, Dove's "I" is nonetheless only loosely bound to a personal self. *Thomas and Beulah* (1986), a double poetic sequence based on the lives of the poet's grandparents, both grounds poetic selfhood in context and sustains flights of consciousness—as when Beulah briefly escapes from the demands of her young children to a "place that was hers / for an hour—where / she was nothing, / pure nothing, in the middle of the day" (*Selected Poems* 188). But its contextualized poetic selves are quite clearly distinct from the poet's. After *Thomas and Beulah*'s striking marriage of lyric and history, Dove begins to work in a more overtly autobiographical vein, writing an "I" more easily identified as the poet's own.

This happens most fully in *Grace Notes* (1989). One of its most striking poems, "Genetic Expedition," revises both the Emersonian sublime, and the confessional mode. Confessional poetry would seem fundamentally to oppose the Emersonian ideal of transparency; its self is particular rather than universal, vulnerable rather than powerful, the victim of biographical accident (such as childhood trauma or mental illness) rather than capable of visionary transcendence. The nakedness that for Richard Poirier represents the spiritual rather than the social self (29) is of a different order than that of the "naked . . . confession" M. L. Rosenthal ascribed to Robert Lowell's *Life Studies* (57); likewise the transparency of Emerson's eyeball is not that of transparent—"open, candid, ingenuous" (*OED*)—self-disclosure. "Genetic Expedition" strikingly conjoins these opposing ideals of nakedness and of transparency, evoking a self at once identifiable and elusive, grounded and airborne. The poem thus enacts an expedition, a poetic transport, beyond the domestic, the personal, and the bodily, exceeding but not rejecting its origins. (The *OED*'s first definition of "genetic" is "pertaining to, or having reference to, origin.") Such an expedition involves not only "a sending or setting forth," "a journey, voyage, or excursion," but also the etymological sense of "expedite" as "to free (a person's) feet from fetters." In this movement, desired and radically unsettling, Dove locates both the "I"'s instability and its agency.

In "Genetic Expedition," the speaker's self-description as a black woman with a white German husband and a child matches that of other poems in *Grace Notes* and Dove's biography, tempting us to conflate the "I" with the historical self. The poem begins confessionally, with frank, if good-humored self-exposure:

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Each evening I see my breasts
slacker, black-tipped
like the heavy plugs on hot water bottles:
each day resembling more the spiked fruits
dangling from natives in the *National Geographic*
my father forbade us to read. (*Grace Notes* 42)

Of course, the speaker knows that the seemingly naked self is mediated—through metaphor, through the cultural imperialism of the *National Geographic*, and through poetic precursors, here most clearly Elizabeth Bishop's "In the Waiting Room" (where a child, reading the *National Geographic*, encounters African women with "awful hanging breasts" [161]). "Forbade" suggests the father's wish to protect the child from cultural stereotypes, but also perhaps, a prohibition for the adult poet self against writing about the body in such a seemingly intimate way.[10]

Continuing to expose the body, the second stanza threatens to become mired in the mundane, the purely domestic:

Each morning I drip coffee onto my blouse
and tear into one slice of German bread,
thin layer of margarine, radishes, the years
spreading across my dark behind, even more
sumptuous after childbirth, the part of me
I swore to relish

always.

The poem seems to relish its own dailiness: each night, each morning. While, as she says in an interview, Dove has aimed to avoid writing poems "that assumed the writer's personal life was intensely interesting," preferring that "the personal not be so self-indulgent" ("Navigating" 2), here she deliberately courts the charge of that indulgence, seeming mischievously to defy Yeats's pronouncement that "even when the poet seems most himself . . . he is never the bundle of accident and incoherence that sits down to breakfast" (517). But this is only the starting point of the expedition.

The third stanza departs from the poem's origin in bodily self-description:

My child has
her father's hips, his hair

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like the miller's daughter, combed gold.
Though her lips are mine, housewives
stare when we cross the parking lot
because of that ghostly profusion.

"Ghostly" starts the poem's journey away from the mundane and the concrete. It seems to have replaced the title word "genetic"; a description of genetic characteristics leads to the sense that the child's appearance is haunted by her parents. If "genetic" here concerns precisely what's embodied, it is odd to associate the genetic with the ghostly, both because genes themselves are bodily, and because how they are expressed here is through physical traits; we're not told, for example, that the child has inherited her parents' musical talent, which we might surmise from the reference to Schubert's *Die Schöne Müllerin*, the beautiful miller's daughter. (In the biographical reading the poem invites, the reference to Schubert points to the child's German heritage by way of her father.)

The child's visual characteristics attract the unwelcome "stare" of housewives; she attests to a "crossing" of racial boundaries that seems to attract a degree of suspicion. A more troubling allusion behind the daughter's hair, then, might be to Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea,* where a painting of the Miller's Daughter, a typical English girl, goes up in flames in an incident of racial violence. But the stare gives way, in the fourth stanza, to a different sort of look, exchanged between mother and daughter, a gaze that becomes a transport:

You can't be cute, she says. *You're big.*
She's lost her toddler's belly,
that seaworthy prow. She regards me
with serious eyes, power-lit,
atomic gaze
I'm sucked into, sheer through to
the gray brain of sky.

From the cozy breakfast table Dove transports us to outer, or inner, space, where this profoundly unsettling ending leaves us, unmoored. Part of this unsettling happens through syntax: the last sentence's shifting structure in which each new phrase makes us reassess the syntax of the sentence as a whole and the part played by the previous phrase. We first read "power-lit" as describing, retrospectively, "serious eyes," but then must reread it as an adjective describing "gaze," and then "gaze" functions in a syntactically

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unexpected way, as what "I'm sucked into." The unsettling also involves what happens, grammatically, to the "I." It has appeared in stanzas one and two in "I see," "I drip coffee," "I swore to relish"—as grammatical subject. In stanza three, there is no "I," but there are possessives—"my child," her lips are mine—and a "we." Stanza four presents first the "I" transformed into a "you," addressed *by* the daughter; then a "me" regarded by her, then an "I" "sucked into." In the last instance "I" is a grammatical subject, but something is being done to it. It is a finely balanced moment. Does this experience of transport involve a loss of agency and selfhood, or a transcendence of the mundane self in an influx of poetic power?

Whereas earlier in *Grace Notes,* in "Pastoral" "sucked" describes the "amazing gulps" of her breastfeeding baby by which the mother feels momentarily "diminished" (38), here, in the context of "atomic" and "sky," "sucked" might suggest a black hole. But in either case, the potential threat of being swallowed up gives way to an opening out. Such an expedition is very different from "the sensation of falling off / the round, turning world / into cold, blue-black space" in Bishop's "In the Waiting Room" (160). In its exhilaration it is closer to Emerson's famous account in *Nature,* evoked by "serious eyes," "gaze," the word "sheer," and the reference to crossing the parking lot:

> Crossing a bare common, in snow puddles, at twilight, under a clouded sky, without having in my thoughts any occurrence of special good fortune, I have enjoyed a perfect exhilaration. . . .Standing on the bare ground,—my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space,—all mean egotism vanishes. I becomes a transparent eye-ball. I am nothing. I see all. The currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God. (10)

While behind Dove's daughter's "atomic gaze" lies Emerson's "part or particle," it is nonetheless almost too easy to enumerate differences between these passages of transport. Where Emerson describes what Michelle Kohler calls a "transparent, disembodied state of total union with nature" (28), Dove evokes a self opaque, embodied, and in relationship with another person. Emerson writes, "The name of the nearest friend sounds then foreign and accidental. To be brothers, to be acquaintances,—master or servant, is then a trifle and a disturbance" (10); for Dove, the daughter is essential, her gaze enabling the occasion of the "I"'s transport. The child is a metaphor for the poem, with its "ghostly profusion" of intertextual ancestors, but, sharing in a mutual gaze, she is also accorded

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subjectivity, becoming not what Emerson calls in "The Poet" one of the "deathless progeny" (457) of works budding off from the parents, but a particular individual whose gaze encompasses desire, respect, aggression, and the potential for mutual recognition. Lastly, the distinction between master and servant Emerson denies is recalled in the etymological roots of Dove's title word "expedition." Her speaker's self-presentation as a black woman, and the mother of a mixed-race child—a role freely chosen, yet haunted by the history of American slavery—might be seen as correcting Emerson by means of another American ancestor, the former slave, abolitionist, and advocate of women's rights Sojourner Truth: where Truth bared her muscular arm and asked, ain't I a woman?, Dove's speaker bares her feminine, maternal, "dark" body and asks, ain't I a poet?

But Dove's relation to Emerson is not only oppositional. She shares the impulse toward universality, and claims the exhilaration as her own, being drawn from and through the bodily toward the disembodied, from the opaque toward the transparent, from the sociohistorical, toward the spiritual or "ghostly"—an impulse concentrated largely in the word "sheer." The *OED*'s first definition of "sheer" as an adjective is not its most common modern usage, "transparent," but an obsolete meaning: "exempt, free (from service or fealty); clear, acquitted (from guilt, crime, etc.)"; similarly, an obsolete meaning of "sheer" as a verb is "to clear, free, acquit from blame." Thus one who is sheer, who has been sheered, is one who has undergone an expedition, a freeing. In this context "sheer" also suggests, homophonically, "shear." Deriving from the root for "to separate," it means "to cleave, divide, said esp. of ships, birds, etc.," enlarging the suggestiveness of the image of the child as a ship, with a "seaworthy prow," and of the birdlike ascent into the sky at the end of the poem, a conjunction recalling abolitionist Frederick Douglass's account of his longing when enslaved: "Could I but swim! If I could fly!" (50). As an adjective describing a rock face, an ascent, or a descent, "Sheer" suggests the extreme steepness, the monolithic wall without breaking point, evoked in definitions of the sublime, which emphasize a solitary encounter with nature. "Sheer," however, also points toward "share." To share means to divide, but also means to unite, to own or use or experience something in common. People might share a loaf of bread by dividing it into parts; but they might also share a mutual regard or love. A definition pertaining to chemistry (to which "atomic" has pointed us) is suggestive: "Of an atom, orbital, etc.: to hold (one or more electrons) in common with another atom or orbital, so as to form a covalent bond." The power of the atomic gaze, then, is not only the power to annihilate (through the enormous

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energy released by atomic fission or fusion). We are not only atoms; we are part or particle of each other.

Dove's final phrase, "the gray brain of sky," grounds the expansive cognitive movement outward and upward in the body, the gray matter of the brain. Behind that phrase I hear another of the poem's American ghosts, Emily Dickinson, particularly these stanzas:

> The Brain—is wider than the Sky—
> For—put them side by side—
> The one the other will contain
> With ease—and You—beside—
>
> The Brain is just the weight of God—
> For—Heft them—Pound for Pound—
> And they will differ—if they do—
> As Syllable from Sound— (312-13)

More than Emerson's disembodied, transparent eyeball, Dove's gray brain of sky resembles Dickinson's weight, a "Heft" shared by "Brain" and "God." Further, the movement from minute details to cognitive transport in Dove's poem resembles the expeditions many of Dickinson's poems enact and record. Unlike Dickinson's, Dove's begin in self-revealing embodiment. But such embodiment does not preclude flight. "Genetic Expedition" does not merely describe, but enacts an unsettling, unanticipated arc upward and outward from the self-regarding to the outward-gazing, the body to the spirit, the known to the unknown. I have read the poem slowly in order to trace the experience of this movement, which is a process and not an end point. In this gesture Dove locates lyric freedom.

§

Strikingly different from the seemingly naked self-presentation with which "Genetic Expedition" opens is the portrait of the artist with which "Ars Poetica" ends:

> What I want is this poem to be small,
> A ghost town

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On the larger map of wills.
Then you can pencil me in as a hawk:
a traveling x-marks-the-spot. (*Grace Notes* 48)

It is not difficult to see why critics have taken these lines, with their appealing ideals of elusiveness, the freedom of flight, and the piercing vision of the bird of prey, as a sincere ars poetica, and have been eager to comply with the speaker's ostensible request. Therese Steffen, for instance, pencils in the "x" and convincingly elaborates its multiple significances (4–5). Yet there is a tension between "What I want" and the "wills" Dove's "I" seems to reject, including what the poem sees as the essayist's will for immersion in the landscape ("I wanna be *in* this") and the novelist's for mastery over it ("he entered each day with an ax").[11] An equal tension runs between the cozy invitation trusting that "you" the reader will comply with the poet's modest, "small" request, and a desire to elude the reader, to be a moving target: if in politics a hawk is the opposite of a dove, penciling in Dove as a hawk might be precisely wrong. Embracing the traveling "x" as Dove's self-definition misses the authorial "I"'s ghostly proliferation through the poem, its ambivalent relation to conflicting versions of poetic agency and to audience.

A potentially more troubled relationship to audience characterizes "In the Old Neighborhood," completed in the days after Dove was offered the position of Poet Laureate in 1993 (*Conversations* 137). Negotiating the self's relationship to biographical origins (the "I" returns to her childhood home for her sister's wedding), the poem equally confronts how the difficult endeavor *"To pull yourself up by your own roots,"* a phrase Dove takes from Adrienne Rich's "Shooting Script" (Dove: *Selected Poems* xxii), can be hampered by a critical culture devoted to identitarian readings. "In the Old Neighborhood" offers an uncomfortable, even painful, image for the poet's potential relation with her readership in a bird trapped and killed in a fan in the attic:

Chink. Chink. Sound made by
a starling the first hot morning
in June, when Dad switched on
the attic fan and nothing
stirred—faraway then
a *chink-chip-shiver,*

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whittled breath of a bird
caught in the blades.

We each dropped our books
and ran to identify
the first tragedy of the season:
baby sister run down
or a pebbly toad
the lawn mower had shuffled
into liver canapes—
each of us thinking
At least I'm not the one.
Who could guess it would be
a bird with no song,
no plumage worth stopping for?
Who could think up a solution
this anonymous, a switch
flipped on reverse
to blow the feathers out? (*Selected Poems* xxv)

The bird as icon of the poet is a familiar trope, and Dove is not the first to associate its embodiment with mortality (as in Hardy's "Shelley's Skylark") or violence (as in Eliot reinscribing Keats's nightingale as Philomel, in The Waste Land). For Peter Erickson, however, this incident alludes to Paul Lawrence Dunbar's "Sympathy," registering by means of "the bird's triple negative," "The fear of a black poet's failure":

> the starling has "no plumage worth stopping for" because it is black; the "bird with no song" signifies poetic inability; the bird's annihilation, concluded by the unceremonious disposal with the fan's reverse switch, condemns it to anonymity. Dove's own poetic splendors are proof against this fate, but her cruelly macabre farce of the starling's demise ruefully acknowledges the lingering force of the stereotype that she has had to overcome. (97)

Erikson reads Dove through the lens of racial identity, as if it were a timeless essence. But for Dove, newly appointed Poet Laureate, the dangers are not failure and anonymity, but the pressures of publicity.[12] In this context, far from constituting a punitive sentence, anonymity may be an ambivalently wished-for "solution" to the problems of publicity, and even,

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perhaps, of unwelcome dissection (like that Dickinson critiques in "Split the Lark and you'll find the music").[13]

In "In the Old Neighborhood," the pun on "fan" renders the poet's enthusiastic audience the agent of the bird's destruction. Being "identifi[ed]," especially being fixed by labels others rush to apply, is itself a "tragedy," a way of being "caught" that the "I" in these stanzas evades. The grammatical subjects of the stanzas recounting the incident are "Dad," "nothing," "We," "the lawn mower," "each of us," "Who" and "Who" again, "I" appearing only in the italicized thought of "each of us" ("*At least I'm not the one*"). The "I" is thus linked with survival, but also with evasion. The "solution" the syntax attempts is to keep identity in question—"Who could guess . . . ?"; "Who could think . . . ?"—anonymity seeming to enable inventive thought. Of course the solution is no solution for the bird, but "*At least I'm not the one*" explicitly distances the self from the bird on whose fate the stanza remains so unflinchingly focused. Rather than assert the "I" as a presence, Dove locates it in syntactic and linguistic dexterity.

The stanza's questions are answered incongruously, across the stanza break, by the poem's conclusion:

> "—tea roses, I'd say, plus
> a few carnations—and baby's breath,
> of course. Are ferns
> too much?" I am back
> again, matron of honor,
> firstborn daughter nodding yes
> as I wrap bones and eggshells
> into old newspapers for burning,
> folding the corners in
> properly
> as I had been taught to do. (*Selected Poems* xxv-vi)

The "I" is "back" in recognizable form; yet Dove's resistance to recognition, to social and familial location, persists. Beginning in mid-sentence and mid-quotation, the stanza severs the speech from any speaker, though we can conclude that it is the mother discussing the younger daughter's bridal bouquet, returning the "I" to the present time and place, in which she takes on the role of an attentive daughter, performing continuity with her past self, burning bones and eggshells as she was "taught to do"

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(possibly to produce bone meal fertilizer for the father's roses; his gardening recurs throughout the poem). This continuity, however, incorporates radical change: following the bird's death, the suggestion of a funeral pyre is unmistakable. Further, the lines recall images from Adrienne Rich's "Shooting Script" (from which Dove takes her epigraph):

> They come to you with their descriptions of your soul.
> They come and drop their mementoes at the foot of your bed; their feathers, ferns, fans, grasses from the western mountains.
>
> They wait for you to unfold for them like a paper flower, a secret springing open in a glass of water.
> They believe your future has a history and that it is themselves.
>
> They have family trees to plant for you, photographs of dead children, old bracelets and rings they want to fasten onto you. (63)

Where "they" here "want to fasten" the "you," Rich imagines that the "you," can evade such identification:

> You are a letter written, folded, burnt to ash, and mailed in an envelope to another continent.

What remains continuous in the self thus imagined? How has it been transformed? What can the letter's recipient hope to understand? As they work to remain mobile, Rich and Dove keep such questions open.

"Shooting Script" later returns to questions of continuity: "Whatever it was, the image that stopped you, the one on which you came to grief," return to it and learn to "read there the map of the future"; "find there how the lifeline, broken, keeps its direction" (67). Where once, destroyed, it became an "image that stopped you, on which you came to grief," you might now see it as not worth having been stopped by. Will a phoenix rise from the flames of old bones and eggshells? Dove doesn't say. Tense and unresolved, despite its title the poem will not provide a comfortable shelter or place to stand, from which the poem emanates as speech.

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§

"In the Old Neighborhood" is an autobiographical poem, but with its incantatory "Let me go back" and "Let me return," and its revisiting of childhood traumas, it is also a poem about autobiography. In it and the other poems I have examined, a seemingly locatable, identifiable autobiographical self is challenged by specific poetic strategies: syntax dislocates the "I," sometimes displacing it altogether (as with the pronoun "Who"), or producing a vertiginous experience (as at the end of "Genetic Expedition") corresponding with the "I"'s; a "ghostly profusion" of voices haunts the text, bringing into relief how the lyric "I" is woven by a web of past texts—a process we can understand anecdotally, as in the account of childhood reading Dove gives in the introduction to *Selected Poems*, culminating with "In the Old Neighborhood," or more abstractly, in the sense that a poem's "I" is always something like Eliot's "familiar compound ghost" (203). With these strategies, the "I" enacts a freedom to exceed its origins with imaginative reach and mobility. In Dove's early work, movement aspires to the vertical. In *On the Bus with Rosa Parks* (1999) and *American Smooth* (2004), however, the poet's restlessness seeks different modes, suggested by their titles: *On the Bus* experiments with locating mobility in the horizontal and the historical, while "American smooth," as Dove's opening gloss explains, is a style of ballroom dance, a type of motion less vertical or horizontal than temporal, and, crucially, stylized.

In *On the Bus*, "Freedom: Bird's Eye View" imagines the sun's vantage point:

> The sun flies over the madrigals,
> outstmarting the magisterial
> wits, sad ducks
> who imagine they matter.
> What a parade! Wind tucks
> a Dixie cup up its
> sleeve, absconds
> with a kid's bright chatter
> while above, hawks
> wheel as the magistrates circle
> below, clutching their hats.

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Rejecting such Emersonian transcendence, though, the poet declares:

> I'm not buying. To watch
> the tops of 10,000
> heads floating by on sticks
> and not care if one of them
> sees me (though it
> would be a kick!)
> —now, that's
> what I'd call
> freedom,
> and justice,
> and ice cream for all. (*On the Bus* 34)

Rewriting Donne's "The Sun Rising," Dove declines the sun's position not in the name of *eros*, but of *agape*. To place oneself on the bus with Rosa Parks is to place oneself in history, the world of "magistrates" and "justice," of the injustices Parks confronted in a place called "Dixie." In echoing the Pledge of Allegiance, the final lines recall one of Langston Hughes's "Children's Rhymes":

> What's written down
> for white folks
> ain't for us a-tall:
> "Liberty And Justice—
> *Huh—For All.*" (390)

Less explicit in its critique, Dove's poem replaces Hughes's "*Huh*"—at once angry, and musical, emphatically syncopated—with "ice cream," seeming to deflate the social ideals that precede it, rather than, like Hughes, exploding the myth of "for all."

Yet Dove's seeming deflation ultimately honors those ideals. The poet has already told us she's "not buying," and the sun's-eye view, and the ending, shows why: powerless to effect "freedom" or "justice," by shining on a warm spring day, the sun can only promote the enjoyment of ice cream by all.[14] In the context of the volume's historical engagement, the "parade" and the "10,000" seem to evoke Civil Rights marches (and perhaps also Hughes's "Parade," which counters with defiant celebration the racist fears of white folks who "*never knew / that many Negroes / were*

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on earth" [389]). While to be the sun is "To watch . . . and not to care," to care about freedom and justice is to "imagine they matter." It is this meeting of imagination and matter that is ultimately affirmed. Dove chooses the world of "Madrigals," "magisterial," "matter," and "magistrates": she situates song in the world of body and law.

This choice is not without costs. Although the subject of "Lady Freedom Among Us" is liberty, the imperative mood of its public address makes it feel didactic and oddly constrained: we have "no choice" (70) but to honor this ideal. Strikingly, in this second-person poem there is no first person. Stephen Burt suggests that "public engagement—speech to, for, and about a public—remains only one of the axes along which poems can explore and transform a given reader's consciousness at a given historical moment" (553), but the poem's very public nature (it was first read at a 1993 ceremony commemorating the Capitol's 200th anniversary and the restoration of the Statue of Freedom to its dome) seems to preclude the complexity of personal agency enacted elsewhere by Dove's lyric "I." More generally, *On the Bus* refuses lyric flight in favor of the earthbound bus journey, linking the actions of Rosa Parks, Mary Louise Smith, and Claudette Colvin, who "made . . . history" by "sitting there" (87), with the reluctant settling down of middle age:

> I sit, and sit, and will my thoughts
> the way they used to wend
> when thoughts were young
> .....
> My heart, too,
> has come down to earth (88)

Such sitting, however, is at odds with the resistance to historical conditions that made sitting a political action, a contradiction the volume does not, in my view, resolve. Indeed, in refusing flight, the poems of *On the Bus* work against Dove's most powerful sense of what lyric can be.

American Smooth finds an unexpected way beyond this impasse; it inhabits the tension between the earthbound and the urge to flight through dance. Dance as flight, here, is less an Emersonian transcendance than an embodied and temporal exploration. The volume opens with two poems about Adam and (especially) Eve, situating itself in a postlapsarian word. Its dance poems thus emerge as a response to this fallen condition: the third poem, "Fox Trot Fridays," describes

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one man and
one woman,

rib to rib,
with no heartbreak in sight—

just the sweep of Paradise
and the space of a song

to count all the wonders in it. (19)

Lyric flight in this volume is a brief reprieve, "the space of a song": its conditions are the body, gravity, and time. Where "Genetic Expedition" ended in space, in *American Smooth* achieving flight depends on working within time.

This is particularly true of the title poem. It begins by locating itself, via the extended sytax, within an ongoing past action:

We were dancing—it must have
been a foxtrot or a waltz,
something romantic but
requiring restraint,
rise and fall, precise
execution as we moved
into the next song without
stopping, two chests heaving
above a seven-league
stride . . . (39)

The second of the poem's two sentences is equally extended, beginning with a subordinate clause that situates us within an ongoing action that is interrupted by the sentence's main subject and verb, leading to the subordinate clause where the event that is the poem's subject finally appears:

And because I was distracted
by the effort of
keeping my frame
(the leftward lean, head turned

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just enough to gaze out
past your ear and always
smiling, smiling),
I didn't notice
how still you'd become until
we had done it
(for two measures?
four?)—achieved flight,
that swift and serene
magnificence,
before the earth
remembered who we were
and brought us down. (39-40)

That the dancing couple has "achieved flight" is represented by the poem's syntax and complex temporality. Located in the past perfect ("we had done it"), the moment is over before the reader (like the speaker) recognizes it. "Part of what I'm trying to capture" Dove has said, "is the fact that you can't really capture a gesture or figure or feeling; you get a glimpse of something, then it disappears" (Preston). Such "lyric poem moments" are brief: "once you start breathing again, the moment slides away."

In this volume the words "i am home" belong not to an autobiographical "I," but, disconcertingly, to a bullet finding its target ("Meditation at Fifty Yards, Moving Target" 38). The lyric "I" belongs not at home but in such unsettling imaginative identifications, in the space of art. If this is a space of illusion, theatricality, and virtuosity—qualities the dance poems celebrate—it is also a space of discovery, of the reach toward "some point true and unproven" ("Geometry," *Selected Poems* 17) where social categories that implicitly limit individuals and erect divisions between them can be radically reenvisioned. "The creative mind," Derek Attridge suggests, "has to operate without being sure of where it is going, probing the limits of the culture's givens, taking advantage of their contradictions and tensions, seeking hints of the exclusions on which they depend for their existence" (20). In this way, something unprecedented can be brought into being.

Such a process opens the political potentiality Dove aims for in *American Smooth*. Glossing the title, she explains:

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> American smooth is the jazzier, American version of fox trots, tangos, and waltzes. When I first encountered the term, it seemed representative of so much that is quintessentially American. By "quintessentially American" I mean more African American, the way we kind of riff on things and make them our own. And that became the overlying metaphor for the entire book, the idea of taking whatever you're handed—whether it's history's ironies or a dance style—and making it your own. ("Interview" 1027)

In both history and aesthetics, she suggests, it is possible to alter the inherited—not to escape or disengage, but to transform it.[15]

This potential relies on the challenges of active dialogue and cultural interchange, and a willingness to shed ideals of "purity" (*Conversations* 133) in favor of hybridity and improvisation. It also relies, paradoxically, on the autonomy of the aesthetic sphere as a space in which the poet may exercise what Arnold Rampersad called in an early piece on Dove "the complete freedom of her imagination" (56). In Reginald Shepherd's words, literature offers an image of the "'as if' rather than of the 'as is'" (43).[16] Imaginatively reaching beyond the sociohistorical, even as it remains faithful to embodied experience and historical context, attentive to ghosts and ancestors both given and actively sought, Dove's poetry negotiates this terrain. Imaginatively perceived and inventively improvised on, lived, historically conditioned experiences find unpredictable destinations. In imagining the future and our capacity to shape it, her work suggests, we might keep in mind not only history's fetters, but also such expeditions.

Notes

1. Other interviews take similar stances: "I've always had a resistance to being typecast," placed in the category of "Black Poet," she asserted in 1985 (*Conversations* 21). In 2005, she remarked, "So many generations of black writers before me could not afford to attend artistically to their full human selves because the critical reception would not permit it. They had to 'be black' or nothing" ("Interview" 1036); now African-American poets are "finally exploring the freedom to write about anything we choose" (1039).

2. Dove's 2004 letter to the editor of *Poetry* expresses her disappointment with Garrison Keillor's anthology *Good Poems* (2004) for its overwhelmingly white bias, and with *Poetry*'s reviews of it by Dana Gioia and August Kleinzahler. She

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finds only three black poets, all dead; although "I may be missing someone—poems can be blessedly color-blind"—this is "an abysmal percentage" (248). This commitment to expanding the canon coexists with what I describe here as the commitment to lyric freedom.

3. See, for example, Therese Steffen's *Crossing Color* and Malin Pereira's *Rita Dove's Cosmopolitanism*.

4. For Tzvetan Todorov, the capacity for such consent defines the essentially human, locating the universal—a term he seeks to salvage—in the capacity for self-transformation (21). He defines this capacity in terms of the potential for (qualified) freedom from our origins: "The context in which human beings come into the world subjects them to multiple influences, and this context varies in time and space. What every human being has in common with all others is the ability to *reject* these determinations; in more solemn terms, let us say that liberty is the distinctive feature of the human species" (390).

5. As Justin Quinn writes in 2003, much "criticism of the last two decades has arraigned the American Romantic tradition for the ways in which it was put to use in the burgeoning commercial and political ideologies of the United States"; as such criticism sees it, "Emerson's sublime is naïve: it pretends to abscond from history, but in truth it ensures that one set of social formations" prevails (193-94).

6. For an account of this shift and a provocative analysis of race as either "essence" or "illusion" (*Our America* 134), see Walter Benn Michaels's *Our America* and *The Shape of the Signifier*. Michaels's polemical stance can usefully provoke questions about current critical paradigms of racial identity.

7. In the interview, Mackey goes on: "Mixes of things that defy and redefine boundary lines are very important in the literary politics, cultural politics, and marginalized social politics of the time we're living in" (330).

8. Completed prior to Vendler's negative review of Dove's *Penguin Anthology of Twentieth-Century American Poetry* in *The New York Review of Books*, and Dove's reply, "Defending an Anthology," in the "Letters" section of the same publication (November-December 2011), this essay is not the place for a thorough consideration of this troubling exchange.

9. The play between Emerson's dissolving of the "I" into the eye is articulated in Lee Zimmerman's "An Eye for an I: Emerson and Some 'True' Poems of Robinson Jeffers, William Everson, Robert Penn Warren, and Adrienne Rich," where Zimmerman discusses several American poems that revisit Emerson's disembodiment and one—Adrienne Rich's "Transcendental Etude"—that critiques it.

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10. Talking about her poems about the maternal body, Dove acknowledges her gratitude to poets like Plath and Sexton who "blazed the way" in this regard (*Conversations* 117). *Grace Notes*' poems about motherhood emphasize human, rather than exclusively female, embodiment: in "Pastoral," a mother breastfeeding her infant feels "what a young man must feel / with his first love asleep on his breast" (38); in "After Reading *Mickey in the Night Kitchen* for the Third Time Before Bed," a mother addresses the young daughter's curiosity about menstruation by telling her that this blood is "what makes us— / black mother, cream child" (41)—female and male. See Costello, "Scars" 436.

11. Pat Righelato writes that the poem critiques "the self-importance of male writers" (124), but Dove's poem is subtler and more even-handed.

12. Dove's comments in interviews acknowledge these dangers. As Laureate, she spoke of the "mind-boggling" level of media attention and the strains of "assum[ing] the mantle of the public servant," and of needing to "Forget the private person, cut out the self-reflection, and just deal with the situation on a public level": "That, more than anything, stops the writing" (*Conversations* 124). Earlier, when she began to think about publishing, she had been "terrified that I would be suffocated before I began, that I would be pulled into the whole net of whether this was Black enough," and felt "a pressure . . . to be a credit to the race" (159).

13. In "Arrow," following "Ars Poetica" in *Grace Notes,* a young woman student told, in so many words, by a scholar visting her university, "*you women are nothing, nothing at all,*" finds a "solution" in wearing "yellow brighter / than her hair so she can't be / seen at all" (50); similarly, in "Canary," Billie Holiday's performance is a defense against vulnerability and injustice: "If you can't be free, be a mystery" (64). In "Agosta the Winged Man and Rasha the Black Dove," an earlier self-portrait to set beside "Ars Poetica" and "Genetic Expedition," there is no hiding: both subjects of Christian Schad's painting are exposed on the "merciless" "canvas" (*Selected Poems* 98).

14. Here Dove may also be recalling Wallace Stevens's impartial Emperor of Ice Cream who regards concupiscence and death with equanimity (50); thanks to Lee Zimmerman for making this connection.

15. Dove's 2009 *Sonata Mulattica* integrates its historical and aesthetic concerns in its main subject, the violinist George Polgreen Bridgetower (for whom Beethoven wrote what became known as the Kreutzer Sonata), a European musician born to an African father and Polish mother. The volume's title suggests some of the implications of Dove's project in juxtaposing the aesthetic (the form of the musical piece) with the social category of "mulatto" in which

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Bridgetower's historical moment places him. Itself a virtuosic performance, the volume is centered on a virtuosic performer who feels, as he begins to play, "This is what it is like // to be a flame: furious / but without weight" (119).

16. Bonnie Costello argues that "the role of poetry"—particularly under political or historical conditions that "undermine or destroy the feeling for individual life"—is "to reawaken the sense of one's own life, not as an alternative" to the public sphere but, in a phrase she takes from Wallace Stevens, as a "radiant and productive atmosphere" in which to confront [the] pressure of reality" (xiv). Costello goes on: "this invigorating of agency within a proximate reality to meet the pressure of reality at large, precedes any political determination, though it may indeed refresh one's life as a citizen."

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Chester Himes and the Equality of Hurt

Lisa J. Fluet

> Soon, blacks who did not have guns began to take pipe cutters and wire cutters and small acetylene torches with them into hiding so they could cut water pipes, and telephone and electric cables, thereby sabotaging the communications and sanitation of the cities. Highly sensitive and important areas of economic, cultural, and commercial activity, such as Wall Street and Rockefeller Center, suddenly found themselves without water, lights, and telephones.
>
> —Chester Himes

This moment of revolution, taking aim specifically at urban infrastructure, occurs near the conclusion of Chester Himes's unfinished, posthumously published final manuscript, *Plan B*. *Plan B* chronicles the formation of an underground radical organization founded by Tomsson Black; its primary purpose is "to arm all American black males, instruct them in guerrilla warfare" and prepare them to "begin waging war against the whites" (200). "Plan B," or "Plan Black" is, as the pun suggests, at once a plan conceived by Tomsson Black, a plan for black liberation, and an implicit alternative to whatever the previous "Plan A" for racial equality might have been. Given the parallels between Tomsson Black and one of Himes's early crusading protagonists, labor organizer Lee Gordon of *Lonely Crusade* (1947), armed revolution against white America emerges in the later novel as the new, apocalyptic plan for solving the entrenched problem of inequality; it succeeds what we could term Gordon's "Plan A" of active, and ultimately self-sacrificing, participation in multi-racial labor organization.

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The last day depicted in *Lonely Crusade* begins with Lee Gordon taking a streetcar, then a bus, to a union demonstration, musing that while "enclosed by the stream of early-morning workers," he "did not feel lost or black or unimportant, but a part of it, contained by it, as a ripple in the river of humanity" (386). The novel concludes with Gordon picking up the union banner of a white organizer who has just been brutally beaten by the police, and continuing to march alone—presumably into more police violence, and perhaps death. The irony of his situation is fairly straightforward: if Gordon's crusade thus far has already been a fairly lonely one—leading him to equate feeling "lost" and "unimportant" with feeling "black"—even when acting in a crowd on behalf of a fellow organizer, his crusade will continue as a largely solitary one. While riding public transportation stirs a brief feeling of connection, then, Gordon goes on to commit his most solitary, but class conscious, act.

Plan B offers a decisive alternative to Gordon's approach. Where the workday commute inspires Gordon's feelings of connectedness, Tomsson Black's revolutionaries cut the underground infrastructural ties that bind urban dwellers and workers of all races and classes together, stalling the workday and isolating workers at all levels of employment. Where Gordon marches into certain police violence, Black's assassins fire upon parading policemen. And, where Gordon finally marches into more of the "hurt" that has dogged him throughout *Lonely Crusade,* the lonely black assassins of *Plan B,* though they die in a bloody battle of exploded and cartoonishly disgusting white and black body parts, nevertheless seem not to register the hurt inflicted upon them. As the scene of organized labor confronting a brutal white police force is supplanted by armed black assassins firing on white policemen and onlookers, the victims of violence seem no longer to suffer. The revolutionary underground strike against infrastructure is thus emblematic: violence towards water pipes, and telephone and electric cables, severs the kinds of ties that made Lee Gordon feel, briefly, a part of the river of working humanity, but such violence also fails to hurt its immediate victims, since pipes and cables—like many of the characters in *Plan B*—cannot feel what's being done to them.

It is tempting, in comparing these novels' plans, to take *Plan B* as the trump card. Lee Gordon's hopeful professional narrative of personal advancement, through identification with labor's promise of connectedness, ultimately leaves him confronting the white police force alone. Tomsson

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Black adopts a more corporate model—acquiring capital, hiring an all-black professional research workforce, buying land, moving merchandise—that will dispel any naïve belief in a common river of humanity, and arm his crusading assassins against the vulnerability of their lonely status. If dying alone, and violently, is the only option for crusaders in both of these novels, in *Plan B* the crusader at least dies without perceiving hurt—in contrast to the perpetually vulnerable Gordon, but also in contrast to Himes, in the first volume of his autobiography *The Quality of Hurt*. *Plan B* thus imagines an uncompromising war on both inequality *and* hurt, developing a narrative form for the depiction of violent confrontation between organized black men and white police power in which the experience of hurt is suspended.

Just before Lee Gordon's conclusive lonely march, he considers the labor organizers and workers around him, determining that "all he could bring these people was more hurt" (397), and his observation also fittingly summarizes the career of "hurt" in the novel. Sympathetic observers of Gordon's situation live, as white leftists, safely beyond the dangers that he encounters as a black man with similar politics; his would-be helpers only *really* believe they have anything in common with him when they discover that they, too, can be hurt. The perception of hurt thus moves through *Lonely Crusade* as what actually binds people together, and convinces them that they do, in fact, share circumstances with strangers; in contrast, the imagined forms of connectedness created through labor, class, race, nation, or gender, tend to generate weaker affective bonds.

In a review of Robert Rodriguez and Frank Miller's 2005 film *Sin City*, Anthony Lane offers this observation regarding depictions of violent urban crime in contemporary American film: "We have, it is clear, reached the lively dead end of a process that was initiated by a fretful Martin Scorsese and inflamed, with less embarrassed glee, by Tarantino: the process of knowing everything about violence and nothing about suffering" (86). The particular violent grotesquerie of Miller's graphic novels obviously owes something to the American hardboiled pulp tradition as well, and Himes's Harlem Domestic novels specifically have been criticized for reveling in comparable depictions of carnivalesque violence, without any cathartic, empathetic identification with suffering, hurt bodies. However, the moral presumption within Lane's argument—that is, that urban violence in contemporary American film reflects an aesthetic

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and ethical devolution, from tragic catharsis to gleefully unapologetic bloodbaths—should give pause. Himes's career presents us with narrative forms for the complex depiction of suffering—in the many qualities of hurt explored in his early, politically-oriented novels and autobiography—*and* with narrative forms for depicting escalated, grotesque violence that suspends the perception of suffering for those hurt by it. Beyond Lane's privileging of depicted suffering over depicted violence, then, Himes's novels invite recognition of the particular formal ramifications of each. Thus shared feelings of suffering and hurt may enable the formation of the strongest affective bonds between strangers, yet fail to deliver on the promise of collective action articulated by labor, ultimately producing for Himes's black protagonists more vulnerable isolation. Conversely, while representations of violence without suffering effectively separate bodies from each other, in its most over-the-top formulations, such violence depicts not vulnerable isolation but collective action.

In what follows, I explore the ramifications of these consequences of depicted hurt and violence as they pertain specifically to the progress of Himes's black protagonists, and to the many bodies subject to violence in his novels. I argue that, for his most suffering protagonists, Himes's Harlem Domestic crime novels strategically evade the possibility of a redeeming success, developing a compensatory form we could term the "populist failure novel." Responding to the coincidence of Himes's centenary and the inauguration of Barack Obama, I offer a comparison between Himes's and Obama's conceptualizations of success for the black protagonist, emphasizing in Himes's work the problematic self-reliance that often attends the rejection of success. Further, I argue that Himes frequently conflates figurations of Harlem with the carceral; so that the needed suspension of "hurt" operates in situations defined by anomic possibilities for doing "anything"; in this, he paradoxically gestures towards how spaces of safety might be imagined. Finally, I revisit Fredric Jameson's study "The Synoptic Chandler" to address Himes's episodic reiteration of ritual responses to unsafe spaces: the many "funerals performed" for bodies permanently beyond the perception of hurt.

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The audacity of success

> It is those who are successful, in other words, who are most likely to be given the kinds of special opportunities that lead to further success.
>
> —Malcolm Gladwell

In his introduction to *Dreams From My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* (1995), Barack Obama recalls the circumstances involved in his decision to write a memoir as a young law student, following his election as the first black president of *Harvard Law Review*. As he observes, the publicity around his election "testified less to my modest accomplishments than to Harvard Law School's peculiar place in the American mythology, as well as America's hunger for any optimistic sign from the racial front—a morsel of proof that, after all, some progress has been made" (xiii). The calls from publishers come as a consequence of the evidence of success—a concept about which *Dreams* is notably ambivalent—and the desire to merge an individual instance of success with the concept of "progress" on a broader "racial front." What begins as a structured plan for a series of essays on race relations then evolves, significantly, into a memoir that "speaks to those aspects of myself that resist conscious choice and that—on the surface at least—contradict the world I now occupy" (xiv).

This transition to memoir emphasizes a notable shift away from the more typical validations of personal agency, and from a self-reliant work ethic presumed to attend individual success. Memoir-writing, in Obama's conceptualization here, involves presenting a history at odds with narratives of conscious choice, personal effort, and recognizable achievement. Instead, as he suggests, the form should elect to address what the memoir's ostensible protagonist had no control over, and thus can claim no obvious credit for: race, inheritance, geography, family history, diasporic dispersal. Of course the author's eventual, conventional success, and rather unequivocal American upward mobility story, culminating in winning the Presidency, do nonetheless affect how readers receive *Dreams from My Father*; and, these developments have also contributed to the media's framing of Obama's election in terms of a somewhat oversimplified understanding of "post-racial" times. And yet, while when confronting narratives of success and upward mobility such framing warrants critique, literary studies as a field has often been equally prone to oversimplification, often very

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quick to treat such narratives merely with skepticism for their perceived simplicity, insistently positive endings, and therapeutic, feel-good, even audacious, hopefulness.

The coincidence of Obama's inauguration with the 2009 centenary of Chester Himes's birth invites us to consider notably contrasting ideas about success, race, and socio-economic and educational progress in the United States, as well as the black author's relation to these concerns, despite the obvious differences between Himes and Obama in terms of personal background and racial identification, and the different historical contexts in which each author's *bildung* occurred. At a pivotal moment in Chester Himes's 1955 novel *The Primitive*, later published in unabridged form in 1997 as *The End of a Primitive*, his editor tells the novelist-protagonist, Jesse Robinson, that his publishers have dropped the option on his manuscript, and he wonders aloud why Robinson doesn't "write a black success novel? An inspirational story?" since, as he suggests, the "public is tired of the plight of the poor downtrodden Negro" (124). When Robinson wryly observes that he doesn't "have that much imagination," his editor replies "How about yourself? You're certainly a success story. You've published twelve novels that were very well received." But the conversation ends awkwardly, foundering on the problem of placing "success" within the linked rubrics of race and genre—and on Robinson's own dubiousness regarding the relevance of concepts like success to his writing career.

Where Jesse Robinson articulates a defiant unwillingness to have individual achievement stand in as representative evidence of collective betterment, Obama, in contrast, produces what we could term a "black success memoir." *Dreams From My Father* seems very willing, self-deprecation aside, to enclose a narrative of individual advancement within a broader narrative about race and advancement via education, community organizing, a law degree, and political life. If Obama's situation suggests how speculation upon how access to education and profession can work to mitigate the effects of economic inequality and systemic social insecurity, for Jesse Robinson, promoting the very idea of individual success for an African-American author systematically inhibits recognition that such success is an exception. As Raymond Williams observed, sharing Himes's mid-century perspective while focusing on the concept of working-class advancement in British culture and society, the "ladder" of success via education presents an "alternative to solidarity," in that "it is a device

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which can only be used individually; you go up the ladder alone" (331).

At the same time, however, comparing Obama and Jesse Robinson in this way, raises questions about alternative literary critical implications for the success story. In *Outliers,* Malcolm Gladwell suggests that success tends to operate as a sort of "parable of the talents"; the successful "outlier" is not an isolated, unique genius, but is usually embedded in social, cultural, geographical, and other circumstances that challenge any reading of the the success story as a reading of self-reliance, calling attention to the processes by which opportunities for advancement are made available to incipiently successful subjects. Gladwell's argument bears reading alongside Bruce Robbins's study *Upward Mobility and the Common Good: Towards a Literary History of the Welfare State* (2007), which makes a parallel case for narratives involving successful upwardly mobile protagonists. Robbins argues that literary figurations of the social safety net often emerge from what we might consider an unlikely place: the upward mobility narrative, which structurally endorses the notion that the upwardly mobile protagonist should be given assistance, along the way, by characters who allow him to treat the past as past, and not his fault:

> to do so is not merely to release the individual from misguided guilt, but to win agreement to a counterproposition: that, because society is interdependent, what the individual does is neither entirely his fault nor—as the doctrine of self-reliance had insisted—his achievement. (89)

Obama presents an intriguing case as an outlier in relation to these arguments. The autobiographical success story of race and inheritance in *Dreams From My Father* notably lacks the guilt often attending a protagonist's advancement, in part because the narrative shifts back and forth between Obama and his father (also named Barack Obama) as protagonists. The father whose "dreams" ostensibly impel the narrative stubbornly refuses to fade into the background as a precursor, a wistfully dreaming figure who can be left behind—and provoke feelings of guilt in—the advancing protagonist. Barack Obama senior in fact continues his own educational and social advancement in Kenya and elsewhere, creating new families in a narrative that parallels much of Obama's own story. Such a narrative continues in *The Audacity of Hope* (2006), which links together the New Deal, Democratic policy-making, the welfare state, and collective success in terms of a kind of story of national upward mobility, one that

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enters a profoundly uncertain state during what Sean Wilentz has recently termed the "Age of Reagan" (1974-2008), when the notion of individual "success," in public rhetoric, came to be associated with the dismantling of governmental regulation and the concept of social interdependence upon which it had been premised (Wilentz 135).

For all of Jesse Robinson's justifiable criticism, the success story can thus can also be read as necessarily implicated in a vision of interdependence, one in which not even the ostensible protagonist may conceive of success in purely individualistic terms. In this light, the exchange in *The End of a Primitive* captures both the editor's blindness about what terms like "success," "poor," "downtrodden" and "Negro" mean to Jesse Robinson, and the more radically antisocial elevation of self-reliance enabled by Robinson's rejection of the success story *tout court*. Himes's novels thus are notably attuned to the critical connections between upward mobility and the welfare state. As Michael Szalay suggests, moreover, Himes's own involvement in the New Deal Writers' Project made him particularly prone to conceive his position in relation to other writers, as sharing impoverished economic circumstances partly mitigated by governmental intervention (217). And yet, Himes's fictions also often associate the desire for "success," negatively, to black femininity—specifically, to working for the welfare state, often as a social worker like Himes's wife Jean (*Quality* 97; 111; 131) and Bob Jones's lover Alice in *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (63). In Alice's case, working for the welfare state, seeking to secure her stable, educated middle-class position, is implicated in her acquiescence to segregated society—and points toward her occasional preference for all-female society. The critique of success in Himes's narratives, should be read as troubling, I would thus suggest, and not only because white individuals like the editor in *The End of a Primitive* congratulate themselves for instances of success like Jesse Robinson's, thereby ignoring both systemic social inequality and the tenuousness of Robinson's security. Significantly, the pursuit of success in Himes's works frequently ties together black femininity, an acquiescence to segregation, and the welfare state, denigrating and feminizing connectedness to the social writ large, in order to elevate—by isolating—the insistently self-reliant, intentionally *un*successful, African-American male author.

As Paula Rabinowitz has argued, American films and *romans noirs* of the early- to mid-twentieth century manifest a "peculiar modernism" defined, above all, by their "chaotic repetition" (22) of familiar forms of

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American state-sponsored economic violence—against women, racial and ethnic groups, and workers. And certainly, Himes's early novels, his Harlem Domestic novels, and even his own biography exemplify this pattern, as each returns, repeatedly, to the emblematic circumstance of state-sponsored "hurt" directed towards the victims Rabinowitz identifies. However, Rabinowitz also argues that one consequence of pulp modernism's chronicling of what Himes terms the "quality of hurt"—from the Depression era to the post-WWII era United States—was the emergence of an enduring, false distinction between, on the one hand, "welfare" conceived positively as state-sponsored infrastructural projects, educational opportunities for returning soldiers, and social security, and, on the other, "welfare as we know it"—in Rabinowitz's careful parsing of former President Bill Clinton's phrasing, welfare identified primarily with Aid to Families with Dependent Children, and conceived negatively as feminized, or "about greedy, slothful women and their delinquent, possibly illegitimate, children" (158).

To a degree, Himes's works do maintain a version of this gendered pulp distinction between "good" state-sponsored intervention to ameliorate "hurt"—the New Deal Writers' Project—and "bad," feminized instances of success-seeking that misguidedly associate the social interdependence of the welfare state with the preservation of a segregated state. But overall, formally evading the expectations of the success narrative, his work moves beyond claiming hurt solely for black masculinity.

The exchange between Jesse Robinson and his editor in *The End of a Primitive* inaugurates a succession of episodes in Himes's novels in which both the editor's hypothetical black success novel, as well as what we might term the "upward mobility" genre more broadly, come in for serious critique. In *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1945), after being insulted, unjustly demoted, falsely accused of rape, brutally beaten, and imprisoned, Bob Jones is told by his boss that, contrary to what he might himself think, he had been "given every opportunity to advance" (202). At the end of *A Rage in Harlem* (1957) perennially suckered Jackson—initially duped by the get-rich-immediately counterfeiting scheme with which his lover Imabelle involved him—returns to Imabelle, and to the job he had when he began, working for the aptly named funeral director H. Exodus Clay, who can afford to rehire Jackson in part because of all the dead bodies Jackson's and Imabelle's travels have produced. Himes's Harlem novels indeed are structured by circular rather than upward mobility. If they

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survive, characters return at best to where they started. Along with *The Quality of Hurt*, then, Himes's novels suggest that the success story writ large is an earnest, simple fantasy endorsed and perpetuated by "squares" like Jackson. And thank God for them, as con man Deke O'Malley observes in *Cotton Comes to Harlem* (1965), since without "squares" and their belief in the possibility of success O'Malley could never contrive a phony Back-to-Africa movement and swindle eighty-seven families out of a thousand dollars apiece.

Any endorsement of a specifically *black* success novel, moreover, would run counter to what Sean McCann views as Himes's emphasis on how "class and economic need far outweigh" racial "inheritance" (281). As McCann argues, in the Harlem Domestic novels we find a "society reduced by poverty to a surreal state of nature" (284), not by any perceived particularities of "ancestry or culture," but by limited "education and opportunities"(277). Emphasizing this focus on economic inequality over racial inheritance, McCann draws a distinction between Himes and James Baldwin, whose writings, as he suggests, seek to "develop a public discourse of civil rights" around the "prospect for black self-determination and, ultimately, in hope for the full encounter by white Americans with the history and legacies of racism" (280). In contrast, Himes's early formative "vision of interracial populist brotherhood" places emphasis upon the economic present. Even in the frustrating futility of attempting to mitigate the systemic violence of the economic present upon Harlem's residents—as with Coffin Ed Johnson and Grave Digger Jones, black police detectives serving Harlem—this attention to the economic present stays fairly constant. In the shift from protagonists like Bob Jones to Coffin Ed and Grave Digger, McCann suggests "Himes abandoned the bathos of martyrdom for the comedy of hopeless causes" (285). Yet, in the ironic perspective that Coffin Ed and Grave Digger maintain on hopeless causes, he also retained some vestiges of the New Deal interracial populism that McCann identifies with Himes.

Against the editor's repudiated hopes for a black success novel, then, McCann's reading of Himes in *Gumshoe America* identifies him with what we might term the "populist failure novel." In place of a narrative of individual struggle and advancement wedded to racial identity, we find narratives representing the effects of the systemic failure of collective economic advancement across races—one compelling way to categorize the Harlem Domestic novels, in particular. But McCann's reading of Himes also an-

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ticipates some of the arguments in Walter Benn Michaels's *The Shape of the Signifier* (2004) and *The Trouble with Diversity: How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality* (2006). The goal of the effective redistribution of wealth, Benn Michaels argues, "involves a certain skepticism about ownership, matched by indifference to inherited identity and hostility to inherited property"; personal history may contribute to the formulation of identity, "but it's also, for the purpose of making our society more just—at least if we identify justice with equal opportunity—irrelevant" (*Shape* 167-68). The "we" in *The Trouble with Diversity* refers at once to we who live in the United States, and we who work in its universities—and, in Benn Michaels's argument, "we love race—we love identity—because we don't love class," and thus emphasize personal histories: "we like to talk about the differences we can appreciate," that is, "and we don't like to talk about the ones we can't," and as a result "we would much rather celebrate cultural diversity than seek to establish economic equality" (12).

While Benn Michaels's argument has been widely challenged, I would argue that its pattern—debunking race, identity, culture, and diversity by exposing their collusion in hiding the effects of class and economic disparity—persists, if in more palatable form, in McCann's reading of Himes. In other words, Himes proves crucial, in McCann's account, for making the case that systemic economic inequality ought to be "our" preoccupying critical concern, over race, history, culture, inheritance, and identity. Anticipating more recent, cosmopolitically-inclined critical arguments articulated by Paul Gilroy in *Against Race* (2002), *Postcolonial Melancholia* (2006) and elsewhere, Himes depicts the harsh effects of racisms at great length, yet also suggests ways around viewing race as the predominant critical category through which to view his own or his characters' experiences. Considering Benn Michaels alongside Gilroy highlights the utility of Gilroy's more transatlantic perspective. That is, Gilroy suggests that race has hardly been a category worthy of critical love, not, as Benn Michaels suggests, because it obscures recognition of class but because its origins in "racism" have "made 'race' into a burden—on individuals, on politics, and on democracy itself" (*Postcolonial* 55). To lessen that burden for those affected most systemically by the effects of racisms, Gilroy presents instances of "translocal solidarity" as a means to "the undoing of identity politics" (79). He thereby enlarges Benn Michaels's turn away from identity towards economic inequality in the United States, by turning away from *all* forms of identity (including national identification) towards more

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planetary forms of solidarity that will also, as he suggests, have as their goal the more equitable distribution of global (rather than national) wealth.

The well-traveled, cosmopolitan Himes—who, for example, published through *Serie Noire*—might thus be read in light of Gilroy's critique of forms of identity conferred by nation. Hilton Als's 2001 *New Yorker* essay "In Black and White" (subsequently included as the introduction to the 2002 Thunder Mouth's reprint of *If He Hollers Let Him Go*) represents this cosmopolitan Himes, positioning him to articulate a violence-laden critique of Sartre's "tragic 'Negro'" via the Harlem Domestic novels' "vicious and viciously comic multiplication of crime—that is, of political error" (817), as Jonathan Eburne suggests. However, Gilroy's more utopian readings of the translocal solidarity meet a decidedly pragmatic counterpart in Himes, for whom cosmopolitanism was at least in part about discovering a needed, non-American venue for publication. James Clifford's notion of "discrepant cosmopolitanisms" offers a closer accounting of Himes's perspective, arguing for ways of "perceiving, and valuing, different forms of encounter, negotiation, and multiple affiliation rather than simply different 'cultures' or 'identities'" (365). The critique of Sartre's "tragic Negro" Eburne identifies in Himes, for instance, requires the multiple affiliations of European location, relationships, publication, and audience, and dispenses at once with both identity ("Negro") and the ethical superiority of tragedy, in favor of representations of violence-without-suffering as one way for the African-American author to think and feel beyond the nation. As Kevin Bell has argued, moreover, Himes's conception of "blackness" specifically exists "prior to and always outside social orders of propriety, designation, and tradition," as a "plateau of nonidentity and ongoing incomprehensibility" (848) from which to *begin* writing. Himes's cosmopolitanism, then. like Gilroy's, partly involves the unraveling of fixed forms of identity Bell associates with blackness in Himes's novels; the black Atlantic subject represents the defining cosmopolitan subject.

At the same time, the strategic evasion of identity politics that, for very different reasons, both Benn Michaels and Gilroy advocate, often leaves class—as a concept that accounts for the economic circumstances of individuals, relates individuals to the means of production and to immaterial forms of labor, and more broadly registers the distribution of wealth—somewhat under-theorized. It has grown fairly habitual in literary criticism, I think, to point out how class always gets short shrift in critical conversation—as if all that can be said about class is that we don't

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say enough about it, and would prefer to talk about other things. Another response to Benn Michaels (one that he anticipates) would be that class *cannot* be a particularly "lovable" critical concern; it frequently fails, as Rita Felski has also argued, to inspire the kind of affirmation of communal identity associated with critical work in feminism, gender, race, and ethnicity. In other words, any serious attempt to link critical work to the concept of class concerns itself, in some degree, with efforts to eradicate economic difference, and, thus, with undoing the critical relevance of different class positions as identities to which, in any case, we have formed, at best, only uneasy attachment. As Wai-Chee Dimock and Michael Gilmore have argued, class—even more than its theoretical partners gender, race, sexuality, and ethnicity enjoins us to use its "analytic inadequacy . . . as a rallying point," to address its status as "as much an effect as it is a cause, as much a second-degree register as it is determinative ground" (2-3). But class also enjoins us to explore other forms of affect, beyond love, that do play a role in attaching people provisionally to something like shared economic and social interests.

Himes does not unequivocally "love" class either—in spite of critical attempts to claim him for that particular side—and offers glimpses of how inherent in class are what Sianne Ngai has called "ugly feelings" (irritation and disgust, in particular) inhere to the concept of class. Himes's novels do address the class differences that, as Benn Michaels and McCann argue, are hard for academic literary criticism to appreciate, but when Coffin Ed and Grave Digger comment on the class situation in Harlem to their white co-workers they tend to sound as mechanical as they do in their anti-dope pusher speeches:

> We got the highest crime rate on earth among the colored people in Harlem. And there ain't but three things to do about it: Make the criminals pay for it—you don't want to do that; pay the people enough to live decently—you ain't going to do that; so all that's left is let 'em eat one another up. (*Cotton* 18)

Such complaints express what Grave Digger thinks of his job, but they also reveal a resigned irritation with both economic inequality and the limited means at his disposal to combat it. By the same token, while economic inequality provokes irritation, the Harlemites representing varieties of frequently feminized, predacious lawlessness—Goldy and Imabelle in *A Rage in Harlem*, the "hophead" hit men in *The Heat's On*, Chink

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Charlie Dawson in *The Crazy Kill*, Deke O'Malley in *Cotton Comes to Harlem*—trigger in Coffin Ed and Grave Digger another ugly feeling, disgust, by which they articulate a distinction between their own jobs, and the work performed by the objects of their disgust. In other words, what McCann sees as the detective's blue-collar "working stiff" (284) persona, inherited from the social situations of Bob Jones and others, only goes so far; McCann describes a Harlem divided between "the corrupt haves and the virtuous have-nots" (284), but those who are beginning to "have" a little success, like Coffin Ed and Grave Digger, take their irritation and disgust and move to Astoria, commute to their jobs in Harlem, and begin to look a little bit like members of C. Wright Mills's emerging white-collar middle class.

In *The Crazy Kill* (1959), Grave Digger tellingly observes that "these folks in Harlem do things for reasons nobody else in the world would think of," describing two "hard working coloured jokers, both with families" who "cut each other to death about whether Paris was in France or France was in Paris" (56). If, as Raymond Chandler wrote, Dashiell Hammett gave murder back "to the kind of people who commit it for reasons" (988), the reasons for murder in Himes's Harlem could themselves be most unreasonable. Michael Denning finds in the Harlem novels that "the grotesque overwhelms both the conventional action and the moral of the genre, leaving us with emblems of absurd and comic violence" (167) and, as with instances of men cutting each other up over the relationship between Paris and France, that "Himes often seems to be walking on the brink of a sort of violent minstrel show" (164). Yet in this, Himes also suggests an impulse to get around race, history, identity, *and* economic inequality as defining motives behind Harlem's violence.

Complicating Denning's reading somewhat, in *The Quality of Hurt* Himes describes this Paris/France incident as actually occurring during his time in the Ohio State Penitentiary (63). This conflation of Harlem with the carceral indicates a third concept—besides economic inequality and race—crucial to considerations of how his novels conceptualize mobility, and prohibitions upon it. For Himes, the carceral rather obviously merges undesired state intervention into private life with the grotesque. At the same time, however, as one institutional example of controlling state intervention, the carceral also contributes in a complicated way to Himes's perception of a needed measure of security for the self.

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People will do anything

> I gambled and captained the crippled convicts' softball team to a prison championship and wrote short stories. I didn't have time to think of my hurt. I didn't realize at the time that I was being hurt. "It's just costing the state and isn't hurting me a bit," I used to think of my imprisonment.
>
> —Chester Himes (*The Quality of Hurt* 65)

Incarceration affords Himes an, admittedly unwanted, opportunity to live off the state *without* perceiving individual "hurt"—in significant contrast to life beyond prison, where he perceives varieties of hurt intensely. The source and nature—the quality—of the hurt that Himes refers to here, however, is not immediately apparent. After his detailing how beatings and solitary confinement clearly do hurt him—in ways evident to him as they happen—the hurt here is at once personal ("my"), deriving from outside, associated with the overall process of imprisonment, and one that he can endure unawares. In comparison to life outside, the carceral presents a kind of anaesthetic for Himes. *The Quality of Hurt* concludes on the question "Where could I find that was safe?" (351), and while both volumes of Himes's autobiography suggest the impossibility of locating an authentically safe space, the carceral makes him *feel* safe—or in any case, unhurt. Moreover, the state owes Himes, in his account, and prison thus serves as a means of collecting on that debt. Before his imprisonment, the Ohio State Industrial Commission paid his medical bills for injuries suffered in a serious hotel elevator accident, and also paid a disability pension, without letting him know that refusing the pension would have allowed him to sue his hotel employer for considerably more money (*Quality* 21-22). If the state has colluded with his employers to hurt him under the guise of acting as a safety net, it nevertheless persists as a primary vehicle through which hurt can be briefly suspended—long enough to articulate the hurt in the fictions that Himes begins writing while incarcerated.

Prison convinces Himes "that people will do anything—white people, black people, all people" (65), and while this description notably reflects the Harlem depicted in his crime fiction, it also suggests a way to qualify what has become a fairly automatic literary critical reliance upon Michel Foucault's conceptualization of the prison as a model for

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the social's "normalization of the power of normalization," yielding the routinely disciplined modern subject (295). In Himes's understanding, surveillance is precisely what does *not* have a substantial effect in a carceral setting—just as, in Himes's Harlem, Grave Digger Jones and Coffin Ed Johnson, as representatives of police and state authority and extensions of the prison system, generally arrive on the crime scene quite belatedly. Indeed, ongoing surveillance has little effect on what Himes's characters decide to do, as groups of dissenting bodies only grudgingly acknowledge their authority when Grave Digger and Coffin Ed shoot into the air and order a lineup. And yet as spaces where "people will do anything" both the carceral and Harlem suspend feelings of hurt, thereby calling attention to the multitude of concerns beyond success.

For Himes then, then, both the carceral and Harlem briefly suspend perceptions of hurt, opening the possibility that one could do "anything," thus abjuring the influence of forces like race, economic inequality, culture, and identity. Such limitlessness, in turn, represents a powerful alternative to conceptualizing action solely as leading to individual success—or populist failure, for that matter, as the opening of *Blind Man with a Pistol* (1969) suggests. The sign posted at Mormon Reverend Sam's dilapidated house on 119th street, "Fertile womens, lovin God, inquire within" (7-8), attracts the attention of two beat cops, who subsequently discover the elderly Reverend Sam, numerous "nuns" by day who are his "wives" by night, many semi-clad black children who eat with their hands at a trough, one adult child—a "cretin" cooking "feetsies" which to the police smell like "feces" (10)—and three buried bodies in the basement: former wives, the most recent of whom died in childbirth, prompting Sam's ad for more "fertile womens."

Himes's works frequently seem to relish such excess, provoking in turn the kind of critical discomfort that Denning articulates concerning grotesquerie, violence, and minstrelsy. But even if we can dispute the particulars of Denning's observation, the question remains: what *should* we do, as critics of Himes, with scenes like these? It is, in a sense, insufficient to point out Himes's penchant for wild grotesquerie without also addressing how that functions formally in his fictions; and, overall, *Blind Man with a Pistol* expresses little interest in, for example, associating Coffin Ed and Grave Digger, or even the outside narration, with some kind of critical perspective on the prospect of Reverend Sam's continuing to beget children, contentedly raising them in extreme poverty, and then burying the

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women who die in this effort in the basement. The white beat cops who discover this situation express their disgust and bafflement with people who can continue to "live in such filth" (8) without attempting some kind of substantial change. And while Himes does routinely present the perspectives of the white police in Harlem in order to undercut their authority, the Reverend Sam's house *is* disgusting, or at least profoundly unhygienic: "rusted bed springs, broken emery stones, rotting harness, dead cats, dog offal, puddles of stinking garbage, and swarms of bottle flies, house flies, gnats, mosquitoes." It is precisely the sort of home that might benefit from the less hypercritical, non-police intervention of a welfare worker's visit—and seems to have developed and endured due to the lack of this form of intervention.

Blind Man with a Pistol concludes, in part, with the impending demolition of buildings like Reverend Sam's, and the anger of displaced residents. The narrative articulates the reason for this anger at such "Urban Renewal" or "poor folks removal" (187)—"They had been forced to live there, in all the filth and degradation, until their lives had been warped to fit"—as Coffin Ed and Grave Digger take turns shooting rats fleeing the condemned buildings (188), in pointed contrast to the "blind man with a pistol" about to arrive on the scene. Finally, the novel focuses not on any belief in progressive interventions for improving Harlem lives, but on how Harlemites "warp" themselves to "fit" the landscape, occasionally participating in rat removal only when the opportunity to do so ties in with an opportunity for target practice.

To my contrast between the *The End of a Primitive*'s hypothetical novel devoted to black "success," and the "populist failure novel" encouraged by McCann's reading of Himes's crime fictions, we therefore need to add a middle category for doing and living between success and failure, premised upon the shared ground between Harlem and the carceral in Himes's fictions. As a microcosmic instance of both the carceral and Harlem, Reverend Sam's house presents circumstances wherein people will do "anything"—advertise for "fertile womens," raise children to live literally on their hands and knees, and burying the formerly fertile in the basement—since having a life warped to fit both poverty-stricken and disgusting conditions suspends one's perception of the "hurt" they inflict. Hence the Harlem Domestic novels' impatience with anyone representing anything like a critical intervening perspective on this setting; such perspective would highlight what is hurtful, and force awareness of hurt upon people whose capacity for doing anything is structured around *not* feeling hurt by hurtful circumstances.

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Funerals performed

In concluding, I want to turn to the other notable sign on the Reverend Sam's house—"Funerals Performed" (7)—and to the contrasting perspective on hurtful circumstances that this sign articulates, in keeping with the Harlem novels' reiterated attention to rituals surrounding violent death. The shared ground between the carceral and Harlem, I suggest, as well as the novels' challenge to a more Foucauldian perspective on the carceral, raises questions about how we might position Himes's Harlem Domestic novels in relation to an alternative theoretical rubric for serial crime fictions—one first developed by Fredric Jameson in "The Synoptic Chandler," and focused upon fictions that repeatedly return to the same imagined space, the same detecting characters, and the same kinds of criminal subjects. In one sense, Jameson seems to compensate for the difficulties that hardboiled fiction typically presents to more straightforward critical mergings of Foucauldian conceptualizations of discipline, detective fiction, and the novel form *tout court*—in classic examples like D. A. Miller's study *The Novel and the Police,* for example. In contrast, the "synoptic" reading sees different goals for surveilling figures like Grave Digger and Coffin Ed, operating in a landscape where people can and will do anything, due to a crucial suspension of the perception of hurt. In turning now to a synoptic reading of Himes, it is tempting to focus on his reiterated episodes of grotesque violence. But I'm going to focus instead upon the "funerals performed" in these novels, to return to the concerns about hurt and its suspension discussed in my introduction.

Jameson proposed that hardboiled fictions like Raymond Chandler's, with their recurring detective character, returns to the same imagined space (Los Angeles), and reiterated styles of "episode" that find their origins *as* episodes in Chandler's pulp short fictions, invite us to read them "synoptically." That is, "we begin to collect these episode types"—for example, encounters involving "inept private detectives," "likeable mobsters," "quintessential gigolos"—and, as with the New Testament gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, range the differing accounts of the same types of episodes "side by side for our inspection, and for the exercise of those ultimate mental faculties that govern the dialectic of identity and difference" (34). Jameson does not limit this potential critical strategy to the pulps; in "History and Salvation in Philip K. Dick," he underscores the appeal of synoptic readings "to sort the various narrative substances

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out and classify them" (363). The "dream" of a synoptic Chandler, then, attends both the impulse to reread (when we already know the solution) and to classify the episodic similarities across novels, distinguishing differences in terms of non-reiterated material. As Jameson suggests, Chandler's "self-cannibalizing" reliance upon episodic reiteration, from his early pulp stories to the novels, "participates in the logic of modernism generally, which tends towards the autonomization of ever smaller segments" (33-34).

On the one hand, then, the synoptic reading calls our attention to the autonomy of the episodic in serial fictions like Chandler's, and in pulp modernism more generally. On the other hand, with such a reading, we can approach Chandler's works (particularly the first four novels) in terms of a unified project. This recalls an argument Jameson makes earlier, with "On Raymond Chandler," concerning the unifying role that the hardboiled detective assumes over the heterogeneous array of circumstances and experience represented by Los Angeles, the "new centerless city" (127). Marlowe's movements through Los Angeles, in that essay, thus resemble the synoptic reader's movement through Chandler's novels in the later essay. Moreover, such reading reveals "the office" as "the dominant spatial category of the Chandlerian landscape" ("Synoptic" 39)—as a space closely associated with Marlowe and his work, but also a space to which numerous non-office structures in the novels conform, inflecting even the most private domestic spaces with the public, working-day anonymity of the office.

In one sense it would not be too difficult to "dream" an analogous "synoptic Himes" in terms of episodic reiteration alone, as Himes does indeed return in different novels to the same material, scenes, and characters: the "squares" routinely conned by their belief in success; the grotesque violent episodes; Coffin Ed and Grave Digger's regular meetings with higher-ranked white policemen, when they present their rationales for their actions and get, for the most part, only grudging approval; their routine encounters with madames to flush out criminals hiding out with prostitutes; their regular slapping around of "high yellow women" to get information; and so on. Moreover, a synoptic Himes might claim him for the "logic of modernism"—emphasizing in the Harlem novels the apparent autonomy of the episodic, figured through the perspective of the detectives moving through a space that, like the metropolis in Chandler's and other, high modern, works relies for its formal, if provisional, organization upon the (often driving) investigative flaneur's purview.

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A synoptic reading of Himes does not, however, yield a Harlem organized around the perspective established through the detectives' movements, or through the structuring spatial categories associated with the knowledge-work of policing forces, like the office. On the contrary, the Harlem Domestic novels suggest that this particular part of the city does not seek a center, and isn't brought into coherence through the perspectives of Coffin Ed and Grave Digger. By the same token, as eventual commuters and beat detectives, both detectives resist the association with the office that so marks Chandler's Los Angeles in Jameson's reading; the coherence between the private investigator's information-driven work and the office space that serves as the means to containing information and spatializing white-collar life simply does not apply to the variation on knowledge-work that Coffin Ed and Grave Digger accomplish in Harlem.

In considering how the detectives do perform an organizing function, then, we might look not to their association with office space but with how they enable the novels' repeated returns to rituals regarding the newly dead. When we consider the omnipresence of the hearse in *A Rage in Harlem,* the opening wake in *The Crazy Kill,* the periodic mentions of H. Exodus Clay, the local funeral director, the very names Coffin Ed and Grave Digger, the attention to the unclaimed bodies of Granny and Caleb, the potters field where Caleb, Choo-Choo and the Sheik end up at the close of *The Real Cool Killers,* or the methodically buried bodies in the basement in *Blind Man with a Pistol,* the "Funerals Performed" sign points to how the performance of rituals following death emerges in the Harlem Domestic novels as a primary form of synoptic communality. For all the critical attention to Himes's consistent depictions of grotesquerie, we also encounter repeated attempts to account for the ritualized public practices dead bodies demand after life has ended. In contrast to hardboiled contemporaries like Hammett and Chandler, Himes devotes considerable attention to the dead body after its manipulations by grotesquerie, after its warping by unperceived hurt, after the time it could and would do "anything," and after the police have finished with it. His central detectives function, as Fred Pfeil once described, "not so much as crime-solvers as priests of violence" (40), accompanying those they encounter to the end that always waits for them (even as Coffin Ed repeatedly counsels comparatively innocent bystanders to not "make graves"). This routine focus on the practices and rituals attending the ends of lives contrasts with the hastily sketched-out lives themselves; scant attention is paid, that is, to everything that did *not* render these bodies impervious

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to hurt and capable of anything, but that, rather, led up to the hearse, the wake, the morgue, the coffin, the basement burial, the grave-digging, the potters field.

These endings also return to where this essay began: namely, with the dichotomy between the equalizing properties of hurt and its suspension in escalated violence, spatially conceived in Harlem's carceral state. Given fictional circumstances that allow for the anomic possibility of doing "anything," then, generic expectations of "success" for a single protagonist seem comparatively trite, deserving the derision that Himes's novels frequently reserve for the earnestly ambitious; furthermore, with their ubiquitous funerals the Harlem Domestic novels express lives collectively reduced, finally, to doing only one thing—making graves—without offering potentially successful alternatives for them. In a sense, in Himes's Harlem a person can do anything, or die trying—and, so long as one remains immune to the allure of Williams's solitary ladder of advancement, one will never be lonely. But to conclude, now, in a somewhat different place—if the election of Barack Obama ended the "Age of Reagan," as Wilentz contends, it is worth asking whether Himes's, and our, automatic critical suspicion of the "success story" might now warrant a tentative suspension. If the Age of Reagan associated upward mobility with simplistic conceptions of self-reliance that ignored racial and economic inequality, and worked to dismantle the social safety net tentatively imagined in the New Deal rise of hardboiled fiction, we might now try to reclaim narratives of success as operating within, and enabled by, a social safety net. At the very least, we might now need to reconsider Himes's works not only for their critique of simplistic, overly individualized conceptualizations of success, but also for how they imagine social interdependence, one that underlies not only the more traditional success narrative, but also narratives in which some kind of intervention into hurt lives serves as the crucial measure of success.

At a late moment in *Blind Man With a Pistol* (1969), Coffin Ed pauses to muse upon what might compel Harlem's young residents—who, like the adults temporarily reprieved from perceiving hurt, "will do anything,"—to do the specific things they do:

> What made them riot and taunt the white police on the one hand, and compose poetry and dreams complex enough to throw a Harvard intellectual on the other? All of it couldn't

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> be blamed on broken homes, lack of opportunities, inequalities, poverty, discrimination—or genius, either. Most were from the slums that didn't breed genius and dreams, but then some were from good middle-class families that didn't suffer so severely from all the inequalities. And the good and the bad and the smart and the squares alike were a part of some kind of racial ferment: all of them members of the opposition. And there wasn't any damn need of talking about finding the one man responsible: there wasn't any one man responsible. (169-70)

Here, with regard to my earlier readings of Sean McCann and Walter Benn Michaels, it is worth recalling that Himes did, on occasion, dispense with economic, political, social, educational, and class rationales for public behavior in Harlem, in order to revisit, here via Coffin Ed, the matter of "racial ferment" as a means to delineating causes and effects. And yet, it is finally not race, but an identification with an enduring "opposition" that trumps the other possibilities Coffin Ed considers as he tries to make some kind of sense of the cascading instances in *Blind Man With a Pistol* of public violence in Harlem. Ultimately, it is "opposition" that offers the most damning reading of solitary self-reliance: whether one speaks of success, populist failure, or the insistent return of the rituals performed around the dead, there can be no single individual responsible. The individual responsibility around which crime, detection, and punishment had been habitually organized falls before opposition, the only means to glimpsing, however briefly, the interdependence that would undermine the need in the first place for concepts like individual success.

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Reviews

Strong Opinions

The Matter of Capital
by Christopher Nealon
Harvard University Press, 2011. 194 pages

Michael Clune

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Does a poet's belief about the world, expressed in a poem, have any special claim on us? Adorno thought not. He labeled such beliefs "opinions" and segregated them from that dimension of poetry that does have a strong claim to truth: form (228). Adorno represents poetic artifacts the way the labor theory of value represents commodities: the meaning and value of the work derives from the process of its production. For the modernist literature Adorno considers to have the highest value, this process involves a linguistic imitation of the structure of the commodity fetish. The poem bootstraps itself up and away from the social world, presenting itself as a hermetically sealed monad. Adorno describes the cognitive value of the work in terms of the unique perspective it offers to the analyst's trained eye. In reading, we learn about the world the poem makes visible by detaching itself from it. Literary form alone generates sociological knowledge. Adorno would have us react to poets' manifest ideas about society the way some of us react to a beloved, conservative grandfather's ideas about politics. We politely ignore them.

In *The Matter of Capital,* Christopher Nealon attempts to break this decorum by arguing that we should put poets' beliefs about and attitudes towards capitalism at the center of our critical conversation. Nealon is an acute and discriminating reader of poems, and one comes away from his book convinced of the centrality and depth of late twentieth-century poetry's engagement with the topics of money, exchange, and labor. One of the best features of his thematic approach is the way it makes room for such vital younger poets as Jennifer Moxley and Kevin Davies alongside more familiar figures like Ashbery and Auden.

Nealon's decision to look for poetry's engagement with capitalism in what poems actually say about capitalism is a powerful and necessary ges-

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ture. But it ultimately fails to acknowledge the force of Adorno's implicit questions about the status and value of these statements. For example, Nealon interprets as a statement about actual money lines by Gary Snyder that describe money in terms of a "dazzling," incalculable, quasi-magical power (29-30). Assuming that this is indeed a statement of the poet's belief about how money works, should we believe him? If we do believe him, have we learned something about money we didn't already know? Should we give the poet's words the same weight we give an economist's? More? Less? What evidence should we use to evaluate the poet's claim? Is it possible that the poet could be wrong, that money is not a form of dazzling magic? Or are poems machines for making poets' opinions true? Is this what poetic form does?

These questions arise in relation to explicit poetic statements about economic topics. Poets like Ashbery create a different set of problems by not making such explicit statements. Nealon typically reads these poems as evasions. The poem's economic truth lies not in what the poet writes, but in what he doesn't write, and how he doesn't write it.

But Nealon's ability to tell what Ashbery conceals about the economy in 1970's New York depends on knowing what that economy was really like. And here one questions the nature and status of Nealon's economic knowledge. Should we give his claims the same weight we give an economist's? More? Less? What evidence should we use to evaluate the critic's economic claims? Is it possible that the critic could be wrong? Or is literary criticism a machine for making the critic's economic opinions true? Is this what the form of the critical sentence does in the context of the modern research university? Does it work?

§

The Matter of Capital begins with a chapter devoted to the modernist poets whose work shapes postwar poetry's handling of economic matters. Ezra Pound and W. H. Auden respond to the catastrophes of the early and mid-twentieth century by developing two different models. The former creates a "humanist writing-as-pedagogy retooled for the 20th century" (50) and thus develops the prototype of poetry as container for the poet's economic beliefs. Nealon provides an overview of Pound's use of portions of the *Cantos* to explicate the social credit theory of Clifford Hugh

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Douglas. This is hardly an auspicious start for a new humanist pedagogy, and Nealon notes Leon Surette's description of that theory's crippling contradictions.

By contrast, Auden's contribution to postwar poetry's engagement with economic matters lies not in the articulation of explicit beliefs about the economy, but in the fashioning of what Nealon calls a "middle" tone, by which the poet acknowledges historical trauma while avoiding the risks of Pound's apocalyptic register. This middle tone is especially interesting as a response to what Auden sees as modernity's "universalization of specialization" (39). Specialization is, in many ways, the central, if under-acknowledged, problem of Nealon's book. The mid-century poet wants a language adequate to an increasingly complex socio-economic situation. But he faces the challenge of finding a discourse that will be authoritative in the context of a proliferation of expertise that threatens to trivialize the generalist perspective traditionally associated with literature. To meet this challenge, Auden and Pound adopt two different, equally exemplary postures. In a move that much postwar poetry will replicate, Pound seizes on a big-picture economic theory that is derided by academic economic experts. The payoff is a discourse that is both total in scope, and so institutionally marginal that elite poetry can plausibly claim to be among its most effective means of circulation, especially in the academy. The risk is that the theory's incoherencies will qualify, rather than amplify, poetry's claim to social knowledge. Auden's way is less risky. He adopts a stylistic solution, finding a "campy" tone that ironizes its own claims about the state of the world.

John Ashbery, the subject of Nealon's second chapter, follows Auden's way, though with several surprising Poundian feints. This chapter is the heart of the book, and illustrates both its achievements and flaws. Nealon's readings of the poetry are often, as throughout this volume, splendid. Ashbery's work famously resists attempts to extract a program, method, or message. His poems can seem like ingenious machines for making nearly any statement look faintly ridiculous, especially any statement about the principles of the poetic machine's construction. Nealon's approach succeeds by for the most part wisely eschewing the temptation to take Ashbery's lines as propositions. Instead, the critic investigates how the poet "builds a textual matter . . . that works more by cross-reference than by argument, more by the recurrence of topoi than by syllogism" (86). The

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outcome of this investigation is a persuasive account of Ashbery's "optional apocalypse, in which a judgment, or crisis, is simply walked away from, or converted from looming catastrophe to consumable spectacle by the choice of spectatorship" (89).

The chapter culminates in perhaps the best reading of Ashbery's curious sense of time yet. "Ashbery," Nealon contends, "relies on the notion that time is fluid in order to dodge the implications of punctual, public event" (98). This assertion admirably illuminates a key feature of Ashbery's work, powerfully drawing together the poet's fascination with crepuscular hours, his way of catching objects in the midst of changing, people in the midst of leaving, voices at the point of disappearing. Nealon's deft account of the attitude projected by the poems' temporality emphasizes the way it provides Ashbery with a tough and mobile "resistance to politics" (79). But two problems arise when Nealon tries to tie the catastrophes Ashbery wants to look away from to particular features of the economy of seventies New York. The first problem concerns Nealon's attempt to extract definite, Pound-style economic statements from Ashbery. As an example of such a statement, he cites the following lines: "For the factory, deadpanned by its very existence into a / Descending code of values, has moved right across the road from total financial upheaval / And caught regression head-on" (77). Nealon declares that these verses "describe exactly the parameters of the struggle of the American city in the seventies: would they remain industrial, or become financial?" But the lines do not appear to suggest the either/or Nealon finds in them. Rather, they show the financial upheaval as part of the same space, and the same process, as the factory. And of course Ashbery's tone in these lines is, to say the least, ambivalent. His spastic ratcheting up of the metaphors by which we habitually attribute agency to abstractions might caution us against discovering here a sober intention to diagnose the challenges facing city planners in the seventies.

This leads to a rather fuzzy sense of the "exact" description Ashbery purportedly offers us. Nealon habitually presents vagueness as precision. We are told for example that "Ashbery, like Moxley, is keenly aware of what it is, precisely, he's looking away from—in his case, something like the consolidation of capitalist spectacle in 1970's New York" (10). The dissolution of precision into something-likeness is the result of the collision Nealon arranges between Ashbery's verse and the analyses of several

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authorities—such as David Harvey and Harry Shutt—on which Nealon relies for his understanding of the economics of Ashbery's urban context. Harvey, at least, is exact where Ashbery is slippery. Nealon says that he finds Harvey to be "especially persuasive" (76) in his account of the causes of the crisis that afflicts New York in the seventies. One never learns why, because Nealon doesn't subject the economic authorities in this chapter to the same scrutiny that he applies to Pound's social credit theory. And yet Harvey's economic analysis is founded on the classical labor theory of value, a theory long discredited among leftist economists even in Pound's day.

One wonders what criteria Nealon uses to ascertain the degree of Harvey's persuasiveness. Of course, as is especially clear now, the marginality of a theory with respect to academic economics hardly implies falsity. In fact, this moment, when economists' conventional wisdom is undergoing radical revision in the wake of the financial crises, offers an especially auspicious opportunity to argue for the necessity and validity of alternative approaches. But marginality does not immediately confer validity, either. If Nealon has a reason for finding analyses predicated on the labor theory of value persuasive, he needs to make an argument, or at least cite someone who is making such an argument. But there is nothing like that here, and no acknowledgement of the economic debates currently raging on the left.

Instead, Nealon's method is to translate Ashbery's language into a loosely Marxist idiom. For example, he cites the following lines by Ashbery: "Self service / And the honor system prevail, resulting in / Tremendous amounts of spare time, / A boon to some, to others more of a problem" (95). Nealon comments that these lines concern "the problem of free time, surplus, and relief in shared alienation." On the next page Nealon suggests that Ashbery "turns his surplus into use value" (96). Here Nealon develops his own method for dealing with the "universalization of specialization." The problems of labor, capital, and exchange are complex topics, not easily mastered by what Frederic Jameson, describing his own baffled attempt to understand economics, has called disciplinary "tourism" (267). The critic's translation of the language of the poet into the language of an institutionally marginal economic theory substitutes for argument. But this leaves the status of the critic's economic knowledge in question. And since the plausibility of interpreting Ashbery's poetry as

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economic statement depends on convincing the reader that Nealon has described Ashbery's actual economic context, the absence of an attempt to convince undermines the status of his reading.

Several times in *The Matter of Capital* Nealon attacks what he sees as the attempt to discredit critique. Yet he offers sympathetic readers no way of crediting the economic opinions on offer here. As Benjamin Kunkel has recently noted, the critique mounted by left social science against free market ideology has made almost no reference to the economic ideas current in English departments.[1] The resistance to the critique of capitalism is very real, as is the resistance to imagining an alternative to it. But Nealon is not yet at the point of facing that resistance. He needs first to overcome the resistance of leftists in and out of the academy to the idea that literary criticism and poetry can offer valuable economic knowledge. This requires different tools than those Nealon brings to bear.

§

If in Ashbery Nealon examines an Audenesque writer whose central response to economic conditions lies in fashioning a style of avoidance, his final two chapters take up poets who work in the Poundian tradition of poetry as economic pedagogy. Unlike Ashbery, poets from Michael Palmer to Claudia Rankine and Kevin Davies make explicit and unambiguous statements about the economy. For Palmer, for instance, "capital makes use of a continuity marked by the analogy" (132). To challenge capitalism's oppressive rationality, the language poets create a "linguistic mass," a "termite art" that includes everything, rejecting the categories and boundaries of the administered society (134).

In his description of this "mass," Nealon offers more evidence of his nuance and skill as a reader. Indeed, it is from the perspective of these chapters that one can measure the scale of the challenge to traditional aesthetics condensed in the book's title. Nealon's method seizes on what has appeared to critics from Adorno to Perloff as poetry's detritus: poetic "matter," defined both as explicit subject matter and as the "linguistic mass" exemplified by language poetry.

But again, Nealon runs into problems concerning the status of the poets' beliefs, and of the creative practices motivated by these beliefs. Here the absence of any reference in this book to Frederic Jameson becomes a

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serious impediment, as such a reference would enable Nealon to describe the discursive context in which language poetry's economic thinking matures. Jameson's sense of the central economic problem is diametrically opposed to that of the language poets. For Jameson, the complexity and chaos of the privatized world are the problem; "cognitive mapping" is the solution. For the language poets, by contrast, the categories and continuities of the capitalist state are the problem, and the generation of chaos and complexity is part of the solution. By the end of his penultimate chapter, Nealon shows Palmer and the others gradually coming to believe that their attention-dispersing methods are in collusion with capital. But why do they come to believe this? Are they right in believing it? Does this switch have anything to do with the assimilation of key language poets into the university literature departments where Jameson's influence held sway? Or have they learned something about capitalism itself? How have they learned it?

The absence of any consideration of the economic theory that most influenced literature departments in the eighties and nineties is even more disabling to Nealon's arguments in his final chapter, on the post-language writing of Davies and Rankine. "Davies," Nealon claims, "has written the most powerful account of—and argument against—contemporary capitalism in English language poetry" (155). How good is this argument? What criteria does Nealon use to call it "powerful?" In fact these questions are misplaced. Davies's writing cannot be assessed from a perspective that occludes its relation to theory—and to Jameson's work in particular. Nealon and Davies have both been reading Jameson. When Nealon reads Davies's work, he sees it as saying just what Jameson said about late capitalism, but even more so, and concludes that we are now in a period he dubs "late late capitalism." But the first question for Davies is not what he says about capitalism, but what he says about Jameson's view of capitalism, and how he mobilizes, and ironizes, this theory in his poetry.

In an article Nealon cites with approval, Oren Izenberg characterizes language poetry's innovation in terms of a new relation to theory, such that the poetic line serves as an *example* illustrating a theoretical proposition. Post-language poetry arguably reverses this relationship, turning theory into a resource for poetry. The scope of this review does not permit demonstration of this point, but it will be clear to anyone familiar with his work that Davies is a poet whose work, even with respect to

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other post-language writers, is especially finely attuned to the institutional situation of contemporary avant-garde writing. Nealon attends to Davies's engagement with one aspect of this situation, when he writes of the poet's representation of the work of non-tenure track instructors of composition in *Comp*. But by missing Davies's complex relation to another facet of this situation—the tense institutional and intellectual proximity of theorists and avant-garde poets—he misses an opportunity to describe the political work this poetry carries out.[2]

§

In addition to its often powerful readings of key poets—some of whom, like Moxley and Davies, Nealon has done more than any other critic to bring to wider attention—Nealon's book mounts a persuasive argument against reigning models for understanding poetry's relation to the economy. By rejecting Adorno's formalism, in which every good poem must say the same thing about capitalism, and new historicist homology, in which everything looks like everything else, Nealon clears the way for an appreciation of poetry's economic thought. If the book ultimately fails to establish the status and value of the thoughts Nealon finds in the poems, it does demonstrate the scale of the challenge facing progressive criticism in the context of the specialization of the modern research university. Nealon's dismissal of this challenge is unfortunate. In the long aftermath of the Sokal hoax, the idea that the widespread contempt for literary critics' forays into other disciplines is motivated by hostility to critique as such has come to seem increasingly implausible.

To find a viable mode of making the kinds of interdisciplinary interventions vital to literary criticism, perhaps we need to look beyond the mimetic approach Nealon shares with Adorno and the new historicists, and focus instead on poetry's creative dimension. Nealon shows how Gary Snyder creates a poem in which money is endowed with a "dazzlingly" ethereal quality. Instead of seeing this as an image of actual money, perhaps we should begin by exploring the means by which Snyder conjures this dazzlement, and the desires that this dazzling elicits, frustrates, and makes vanish. The poem's ethereal money opens complex and conflicted relations both to actual money, and to other discourses about money. By exploring these relations, perhaps we will discover something new about life under capitalism.

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Notes

1. One of Jameson's students, Nicholas Brown, recently suggested that Kunkel should not be surprised that the anti-capitalism of left economists and the anti-capitalism of literary critics share no common ground. Brown writes that critics like Jameson are not actually interested in economic issues at all, but in "cultural" problems. If this were true, it would explain why Jameson and his followers refrain from arguing for their economic positions, and show no interest in the history of economic debate over problems of value, exchange, and labor. But it seems to me that the entire thrust of Jameson's work has been to argue for the inextricability of economic and cultural questions.

2. I do not mean to restrict the political work of Davies's poetry to the context of the academic labor wars. I do think it important to register his especially conflicted position in that context, serving both as exploited adjunct teacher of composition and subject of the essays of tenured professors. But understanding how his poetry represents critical discourse does not preclude understanding how that poetry represents broader economic conditions. My own sense is that the richness and complexity of the economic thought that animates Davies's work can best be grasped by observing how he fashions an autonomous *poetic* economic perspective out of the materials of nineteen-nineties critical discourse.

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Everybody's Antipoetry

Being Numerous: Poetry and the Ground of Social Life
by Oren Izenberg
Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011. 234 pages

Jasper Bernes

As anyone who has spent any time among them can attest, contemporary poets and critics of poetry often display a real enthusiasm for the act of dividing the world of poetry in half and taking up residence on one side or the other. One aligns, almost as a matter of course, with either "mainstream" or "experimental" poetry, "tradition" or the "avant-garde," "official verse culture" or the grimy froth of the margins. But curiously, such side-taking seems to have increased in stridency even as the formations themselves have become more and more confused, either because the margins have been subsumed by the center, or because the barbarian hordes have, at last, stormed Rome and installed themselves as its new rulers. By the late 1990s, the partisans of experiment and the avant-garde had taken up key positions within the academy and other traditionally powerful institutions, at the same time as a new discourse of "hybridity" or the "middle path" proposed to facilitate the marriage of center and extremity. (See, for instance, the debates around the creation of *Fence* magazine—a magazine and book publisher which took as its domain not one camp or the other, but the "fence" between them.) It is therefore a bit disingenuous—or perhaps just erroneous—for Oren Izenberg to frame his provocative and insightful new book, *Being Numerous: Poetry and the Ground of Social Life*, as a response to "a nearly unanimous literary-historical consensus" about these divisions (1). In my own memory, every time such a distinction was broached a chorus of voices would arise to controvert, complicate, or harry it, and nothing aroused more antagonism than, for instance, Ron Silliman's perpetual sorting of poets into such categories on his popular blog. I mention this to suggest that, in a sense, the distinction in question here has, as a secret object, the contemporary moment. These categories, that is, not only constitute a set of truth-claims about modernism or postwar poetry. Just as importantly, they enable contemporary practitioners to sharpen their sense of self by making an example of the past, and projecting their own values backwards.

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Rather than attempting to overcome this division, Izenberg proposes a new distinction—based on "ontological commitments" and "intentionality" (10) and less marred, in his opinion, by a superficial "impressionism" (31)—through which we might survey the twentieth century. In one corner, we have the poetry of "aesthetic splendor," poetry in which, as critics like Susan Stewart have made quite clear, the relation between *person* and *poem* is mediated by sensuous particulars embodied in "that class of objects we call poems" (17). In the other corner, we have a styleless and departicularized "non-poetry" that aims not to create objects of aesthetic experience but to confer value—sometimes through the medium of poetry—on "persons" in the abstract.

Being Numerous seeks to develop a theoretical account of the latter poetry. Izenberg describes this type as a "non-poetry" (11), since its need to distinguish an abstract yet substantial personhood subtending all persons requires it to forgo the particularizing pleasure of aesthesis, to resist "formal mastery" (16) or even, in its most extreme formulations, to imagine a "poetry without poems." For this reason, he argues, poets such as Yeats, Oppen, O'Hara and the many writers associated with Language poetry find themselves, despite their prodigious gifts, "subverting or destroying the very medium that bears them" (4).

This is an original and provocative explanation of the "difficulty" of much twentieth-century poetry, its destructive attitude and its refusal of conventional forms of rationality or meaning, representation or aesthetic pleasure. But Izenberg wants his categories to function not just as speculative reorientations but as literary-historical markers, and in this he is less than convincing. He gives us no hints as to what a new literary history motivated by his categories might look like, how it might cut through or clarify existing groupings, schools, alliances, friendships, and antagonisms, or their relationship to intellectual, social, political, and economic developments. Though he claims at several points that the categories might unsettle established views about who belongs where, almost all of the poets whose work he treats as "non-poetry" hail firmly from the experimentalist camp. (Yeats is an exception, but given that he stands at the headwaters of modernism, most critics would find no compulsion to place him on one side or the other.) Taking the case of Oppen or O'Hara—two of the poets featured in *Being Numerous*—would "personhood" refine our understanding of either "Objectivism" or the "New York School"? Izenberg does not say, although he does evince skepticism about these categories.

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If Izenberg is skeptical about the limits of current literary historicism, particularly its "elaboration of ever-more-finely differentiated micro-histories of literary genres and functions" (31-32), neither does he practice the other kind of historicization—the kind we might associate with someone like Fredric Jameson—in which the individual literary artifact is placed in the broad stream of global history in order to adjudge the dynamics of the latter by the small disturbances the former creates. He does give a few indications of how this latter type of history might take shape, saying at various points that the poetics of personhood and non-poetry responds to "crises of human value" (3) with "a civilizational wish to reground the concept and the *value* of the person" (1). The "pre-political and ontological commitments" (4) that Izenberg locates, even though they might veer off in directions both progressive and fascist, disclose the possibility of "a new humanism." Izenberg's poets bear witness to a century of dehumanization against which they "attempt to make the person appear anew as a value-bearing fact" (35). This aspect of Izenberg's argument is less than satisfying: not once does he reckon with the many critics of universalist humanism, from Marx through Lukács and Adorno and Horkheimer to Derrida and Spivak. Although in a few places he suggests that his universalism should be distinguished from other post-Enlightenment universalisms, he never says how.

But even if he is wrong about the implications of his categories, the categories themselves are largely persuasive, as long as one is permitted to make some important qualifications and provide some missing criticality about their philosophical bases. George Oppen, the subject of the second chapter, *does* seem motivated by a profound ambivalence toward (or dissatisfaction with) the fact of poetry, one that is bound up at every turn with a temptation toward philosophical skepticism and even solipsism. Izenberg, therefore, interprets Oppen's twenty-five-year silence as an essential part of his poetic project: "a poetic solution to the problem of threatened sociability" (81). But unlike other critics who see the silence as a quest for a solution *in poetry,* Izenberg suggests that the silence was itself the solution *to poetry,* an attempt to deny the power of language—to treat "words" as "enemies," as Oppen writes, and to move beyond them toward common humanity. Oppen's return to poetry is not a return from silence but a return *with* silence—hence the gravity and hesitance of the late poems, where each word is eaten away by resonant silences. For Izenberg, Oppen's silence (which never ended) was a recognition "that such

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knowledge as poems need . . . must reside in a distinction not realized in things that can take on formal differences; not realized in other words, in words" (84).

The exact form of such a distinction—really more like an acknowledgment, since it is predicated on non-distinction—gets elaborated in a very complex argument about the figure of Robinson Crusoe in Oppen's "Of Being Numerous," in Marx, and in Saul Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein's "private language" argument. Since this argument gets to the very heart of the philosophical positions in Izenberg's book, it is worth tracking. Both the poem and the figure of Crusoe concern the precise relation of the individual to the collective—the "shipwreck / Of the singular" and the "meaning / Of being numerous." Izenberg's chapter worries the question of how we can say that Crusoe was "rescued." (The word is in quotes in the poem.) How do we understand the restoration of Crusoe to the social totality? Does it even make sense to think of him as having left it in the first place? For Marx, the novel *Robinson Crusoe* and its many later recapitulations (Robinsonades) are a kind of origin myth for the bourgeoisie, a way in which contemporary class society projects its own contingent social relations onto the past, eternizing them. The "individual and isolated hunter and fisherman," whose industriousness forms an explanation for the emergence of current society in Ricardo and Smith is, in fact, determined by present society, just as the free individual of bourgeois society upon which this mythic fisherman is based could not exist outside of a particular social matrix (Marx 83-84). For Marx, then, Crusoe underscores the fact that social relations precede the individual.

While Izenberg acknowledges that this Marxian Crusoe provides a crucial intertext for Oppen, he contrasts it with what he imagines as Oppen's response to a certain problematic in the later philosophy of Wittgenstein. Throughout his later work, Wittgenstein attempts to evacuate the skeptical position—which he nevertheless imbues with poetry and pathos—by demonstrating its self-contradictory nature. In the so-called "private language" argument, he shows that attempts to verify that language implies shared meaning or common understanding are fundamentally impossible, since any observed behavior might result from obedience to an infinite number of internal "rules" (Wittgenstein 75-81). Even if, as Kripke demonstrates in his elucidation of the argument, I produce the correct response to the operation 2 + 2, there is no way to demonstrate that, internally, I followed the operation of addition rather than some other operation (Kripke 7-13). While this might seem

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to reinforce the skeptical position, Wittgenstein (and Kripke following him) suggests that our error lies in conceiving of language as a vehicle that transmits understanding from one mind to another rather than a mesh of practices in which our behaviors agree or disagree, regardless of the images or understanding in our minds. "To imagine a language is to imagine a form of life" (7) as Wittgenstein writes famously. Or, as Oppen puts it, "My language which proves I am not alone" (87). The very fact that Crusoe writes at all proves that he is not alone. It also proves that he *is* alone, as all of us are. Oppen: "*we are others, we are members of others, and therefore alone*" (Oppen 64).

We can see immediately that Marx and Wittgenstein agree, in this instance, that language is primarily a social fact, one that precedes the individual. But Izenberg constructs an opposition between them in order to argue, via Wittgenstein, that "Oppen's understanding of the truth of poetry is precisely at odds with any account of virtue that depends on the social determinations of a 'form of life'" (106). In line with this reading of Wittgenstein, Izenberg has Oppen proposing a solution to something unresolved in the Wittgensteinian line of argument—something that Wittgenstein and Kripke had, in fact, demonstrated to be both impossible and unnecessary. Izenberg writes that Kripke "*does not explain why we should think of* [*Crusoe*] *as following a rule.* How we might come to recognize rule-following as such . . . is not at all clear" (94). For Wittgenstein and Kripke, however, the point is that what we think—the image in our minds—has very little to do with it. As Wittgenstein writes, "'obeying a rule' is a practice. And to *think* one is obeying a rule is not to obey a rule" (690). But Izenberg needs the rule to be ontologically real (rather than pragmatically real) because he wants to move away from a constructivist reading of language use—which would suggest that language communities develop in historical and social terms—to what we might term an "immanentist" view, one that accords with his ethical universalism: the shared understanding between one person and another, between us and Crusoe, depends only on a prelinguistic and prereflective "silent extension of credit" (95) not on any particular, contingent set of meanings. Our shared life is already *there*. It does not need to be made or constructed.

In other words (Oppen's words, in fact): "they are there," prior to recognition (99). Being human does not depend upon any quality or relation, but on an ontological given. This turn toward ontological foundations is the very core of the book, and its innovative reading of Language poetry—a reading to which the entirety of the book builds—revolves

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around this move. But before we get to that crucial chapter, I want to note that the immanentist position seems to owe a great deal to an unacknowledged figure, Martin Heidegger, whose aesthetics and philosophy are quite close to the positions developed in *Being Numerous*. One quickly recognizes that the notion of "personhood" proposed here—a personhood distinguished from any particular set of predicates or identity—is very much Heidegger's *Being*, which we will remember must be distinguished from particular beings (something that previous metaphysics with its analytic, differentiating form of thought, could not do). This is very much analogous to the argument that Izenberg uses against not only the poetry of "aesthetic splendor" (7), but the criticism which attempts to distinguish it. Unlike aesthetic thought, the (Heideggerian) poetics of personhood finds that "the insistence upon difference (between poets, between verse genres, indeed between one person and another) is the very problem in need of a solution" (34). If one then remembers that, in Heidegger, aesthetics and aesthesis is also the problem rather than solution—reducing art to an "enframed" object—the closeness of the two arguments appears unmistakable. Like Heidegger's Hölderlin, Izenberg's Oppen provides a form of authentic language which discloses the originary source of the common being beneath the merely numerous and fractious world of appearances.

Izenberg's pursuit of this common being leads him to locate, in Language poetry, not just the poets' obvious interest in collaborative practice—as in the book *Leningrad*, which forms the primary focus of his chapter—but a kind of collective style, involving thousands upon thousands of largely homogeneous poems marked by "paratactic structure, low affect, quizzical tone, and theoretical orientation" (141). This is the first misstep in the chapter, since such a characterization is inapt for writers who are inarguably part of Language poetry (Lyn Hejinian, Carla Harryman, Leslie Scalapino, Bob Perelman), not to mention outliers and fellow travelers who form important points of reference within the experimentalist galaxy (figures like Stephen Rodefer, Clark Coolidge, Bernadette Mayer, and Hannah Weiner). It does not even hold up against his own quoted examples, in particular a highly hypotactic passage from one of Lyn Hejinian's contributions to *Leningrad*. Izenberg hangs a great deal on this conception of a common style, which he suggests obliterates the differences between individual poets and poems both, and therefore, in its refusal of particularity, reveals the innate grammatical structures

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common to all of us (and, presumably, hardwired into our brains). In other words, his account of Language poetry, and his claims for its paramount importance (which are, I believe, quite sincere, however backhanded they might seem) rest on the ability of the collective style to "make it possible to separate the universal grammar from the merely idiosyncratic habits of a single person" (155).

It is a fascinating argument. One almost wishes it were true. But as I have indicated earlier, Izenberg's attempt to come up with a description that identifies the mass of Language poetry and its near relatives fails from the start. One might look at the examples he gives, which include writers as far from Language poetry (however defined) as Marjorie Welish and Jennifer Moxley (158). One of his key claims is that Language poetry's experimentation operates primarily in syntactic terms, along what Roman Jakobson calls the "axis of combination." But many of the examples he offers fail to conform in precisely this way, many of them violate not grammatical but semantic rules, and many violate neither rules of syntax nor semantics but rules—as Silliman indicates in "The New Sentence"—for coherent combination of sentences into paragraphs. Izenberg's claim for the fundamental sameness of these seems to depend upon his inability or unwillingness to recognize difference.

He is, however, absolutely correct that the object and ground of much Language poetry is sociality itself. Oftentimes, this takes the form of poets attributing to grammar and syntax a modeling function, where the relationship between parts of speech, sentences, or phrasal units models the relationships between individuals or between the individual and the collectivity. And he is also right that Language poets are concerned with developing a notion of a collective subject in opposition to a simplistic conception of the individual lyric voice. But he does not demonstrate why we should disregard their repeated insistence that their project is a constructivist one inassimilable to Chomskyan nativism. Even if they are wrong to think of language as the neutral, plastic ground of social determination, whose manipulation can yield up any number of contingent social forms (rather than containing a kind of inherent ontological deep grammar that remains inviolable), one could always respond that this criticism errs by thinking that literature traffics in truth-claims about the world. Rather, it seems entirely valid to suggest that literature is capable of acting *as if* it inhabited a universe with laws other than those that are in effect here and now, whatever the deep structure of the grammar in which such acting-as-if takes place.[1]

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Intriguingly, a better object for Izenberg's argument would be contemporary "conceptual poetry," which builds on certain elements of Language poetry, and which Marjorie Perloff recently anointed as the twenty-first-century avant-garde to watch, passing to conceptual poets the torch earlier bestowed upon Language writers. These poets—many of whom celebrate their "unreadability" and the absolutely uninteresting character of their writing, apart from the concepts that motivate it—are a much better fit for Izenberg's account of an undifferentiated mass of characterless language. But, of course, it is through contemporary manifestations like conceptual poetry that elements of the past become visible. It is through the various arguments made for conceptual poetry, for instance, that we can come to see Language poetry as participating in an earlier, related project (along with an even earlier moment of sixties and seventies conceptualism in art and writing, to which it returns). All our arguments about the past, that is to say, take the present moment as their secret object.

One unacknowledged "present" to which Izenberg's book might respond is the era of profound scarcity and gutted university budgets in which twenty-first-century literary criticism proceeds. Academic institutions—and they are not alone in this, of course—produce a structural compulsion upon writers to distinguish themselves from each other, to make hyperbolic claims, to draw lines in the sand (lines which the waves quickly wash away), a process that intensifies as resources vanish. Taking exception to a milieu characterized, all too often, by hair-splitting and the narcissism of small differences, Izenberg produces an account of particularity, style, distinction, and difference as a kind of violence. One sees immediately, however, the double-bind into which he quietly walks: to valorize universalism he must identify a particular "type" of poem; to valorize indistinction, he must make distinctions. If he refuses to do so—if he acts as his objects do, and refuses distinction—the field of poetry manifests as pure difference. Abstract and universal personhood, as he defines it here, seems less like "the ground of social life" than one of its forms of appearance.

Notes

1. See T. J. Clark on Picasso for one example of how such an argument might run (213–14).

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Postmodern Belief: American Literature and Religion since 1960
by Amy Hungerford
Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010. 224 pages

Steven Belletto

Amy Hungerford's *Postmodern Belief: American Literature and Religion since 1960* mounts an ambitious and important intervention into the study of postwar American literature and culture. Hungerford draws together two seemingly unrelated strains, postmodernism and religious belief, to show how a late-twentieth-century "belief in meaninglessness" became a significant form of religious belief in an increasingly secular, irrevocably pluralistic world. As she explains in her introduction,

> This book will argue that a century and a half later [after Emerson], with religious critique so firmly a part of our secular condition, belief without meaning becomes both a way to maintain religious belief rather than critique its institutions and a way to buttress the authority of the literature that seeks to imagine such belief. Belief without content becomes . . . a hedge against the inescapable fact of pluralism. (xiii)

Hungerford thereby sidesteps more familiar accounts of literature as either embodying or condemning religious belief in order to theorize how "belief in meaninglessness" may tell a different story about postwar literature and culture. Hungerford looks at numerous works of literature and literary and critical theory, and she ranges over Derrida and de Man (both key thinkers for her first book, *A Holocaust of Texts*) with the same confidence she displays when recontextualizing the New Critics or noting a renewed interest in the literariness of the Bible in the 1970s and 1980s; she offers similarly nuanced readings of writers such as J. D. Salinger, Allen Ginsberg, Cormac McCarthy, Toni Morrison, and Marilynne Robinson, among others. In each of these cases, Hungerford's method is to place a work of literature or theory in new contexts, inventively reframing the work of individual writers in order to demonstrate the importance of belief in meaninglessness as a frame for understanding postwar American writing.

Those coming to the book with backgrounds in critical theory may be most interested in how the argument reconfigures the relationship

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between American literary and cultural production, and the postmodern. There was a time when postmodernism was seen as broadly apolitical, as turning inward rather than radiating out. Foundational work by Ihab Hassan, Brian McHale, and others emphasized postmodernism's formal ingenuity and obsession with language, while later critics read it in economic (Jameson) or political (Hutcheon) lights. *Postmodern Belief* participates in the sort of historicist recontextualization pursued by Marianne DeKoven in *Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern* (2004), which links the development of postmodernism to sixties radicalism. Hungerford investigates the underexplored resonances between postmodern impulses and late-twentieth-century religious belief, challenging our standard accounts of postmodernism by demonstrating how

> sincerity overshadows irony as a literary mode when the ambiguities of language are imagined as being religiously empowered. Writers in this mode see fracture and materialism not as ends in themselves but as the conditions for transcendence. Cultural embeddedness—in the panoply of American religious contexts—comes to matter as much as transhistorical (or posthistorical) aesthetics even for the most formally ambitious of writers. (xix-xx)

The varieties of religious experience Hungerford has in mind turn out to have everything to do with language, for "American writers turn to religion to imagine the purely formal elements of language in transcendent terms" (xiii). *Postmodern Belief* examines various writers and critical theorists with two aims: "to show how belief in meaninglessness confers religious authority upon the literary, and . . . to show how such belief, and its literary vehicles, becomes important to the practice of religion in America" (xv).

Chapter One, "Believing in Literature," begins with a great riff on Dwight Eisenhower's vague faith as epitomizing American religious belief in the 1950s, then turns to Salinger's *Franny and Zooey,* which according to Hungerford enacts the "performance of sacred human speech" (14) in a religious vision that "insists upon the specific content of religious wisdom but finds that content converging in a space of no-knowledge" (12). From Salinger, Hungerford traces a fascinating line through New Criticism to deconstruction to suggest how both invest literature with a kind of religious significance. "For the New Critics," she reminds us,

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> one important fact about literary texts—and especially, about poems—was that they could not be paraphrased, that their form carried with it some unspecifiable, or unspeakably particular, literary quality that transcended pedestrian content. The New Critical poem qua poem is form without content imagined as transcendence. This bid for transcendence reproduces [Matthew] Arnold's effort to make literature a substitute for religion, and is neatly encapsulated in Cleanth Brooks's notion of the "heresy of paraphrase." (16)

The elegant formulation "heresy of paraphrase" is useful for Hungerford's purposes because she wants to demonstrate not only how writers like Salinger imagined literature as having a special religious capacity, but also that critical theorists as different as Brooks and Derrida explored this idea in varying ways: "Language in their [Derrida's and de Man's] hands becomes immanent in much the same way that the names of God are imagined to contain God's presence in Hindu and in Jewish tradition and in the way Christ is said, in the Gospel of John, to incarnate the divine Word" (19). For Hungerford, then, the heart of the matter is that the power of language—and in some cases the very materiality of the Word—is its power to be mystical. As she shows in the rest of the book, writers from Allen Ginsberg to Cormac McCarthy view their writing as related in some way to religious belief, as pervaded by what she sometimes calls a "numinous" quality (83, 84, 86, 138).

Ginsberg in fact provides Hungerford's first object lesson, and she devotes a whole chapter, "Supernatural Formalism in the Sixties," to his poetry and politics, especially as they developed after he returned from India in 1963. In India Ginsberg engaged deeply with Hindu and Buddhist meditative practices, and in a section called "The Politics of Om," we learn how he appropriated the theory underlying Hindu chanting, which supposes that mantras themselves are imbued with mystical meaning that goes far beyond their semantic content, to develop a poetics that invests words themselves with spiritual power (hence Ginsberg's desire to "make Mantra of American language now"). Hungerford first illustrates this point through a masterful reading of Ginsberg's testimony and cross-examination during the Chicago Seven Trial, in which Abbie Hoffmann, Jerry Rubin, Tom Hayden, and others were accused of intending to incite a riot at the 1968 Democratic National Convention. Ginsberg was called to testify because the prosecuting attorney, Thomas Foran, viewed

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him as "kind of the Yippie religious leader" (quoted on 29), and wanted to demonstrate that Ginsberg's frequent recourse to chanting was "part of a repugnant and sexually perverted hippie religious practice" (30). As Foran attempted to prove the perversions of the Om chant, he connected it to Ginsberg's poetry; yet Ginsberg's responses show, in contrast, that he endeavored to write "poems that aim (in theory, at least) to evacuate the kind of referential content that proved so useful to Foran. In doing so, Ginsberg uses the kinship between poetry and chant to advance an idea of poetry that moves beyond meaning into . . . a fantasy of supernatural efficacy centered on the power of sound" (31).

The idea that "a fantasy of supernatural efficacy centered on the power of sound" had currency among the counter-culture of the 1960s is familiar to anyone who has listened to George Harrison's *All Things Must Pass* (1970) or the recording of the "Hare Krishna Mantra" he produced the year before, but Hungerford takes this observation a few steps further. Her larger point is not that Ginsberg ought to be read as a religious writer (which others have done in more depth; the most thoroughgoing recent example is Tony Trigilio's *Allen Ginsberg's Buddhist Poetics*), but rather that the way

> Ginsberg imagined his poetry as spiritual, in the context of the trial and in the years leading up to it, reveals a set of beliefs about language and the supernatural that have remarkable affinities with, and also raise a challenge to, understandings of language emanating from other sectors of American culture in the sixties. . . .Ginsberg's spiritual poetry intersects with beliefs about language common to poststructuralism . . . and to a popular form of religious renewal that transformed American churches during the sixties and seventies. . . .His use of a supernatural formalism for political purposes . . . demonstrates, further, the social and philosophical implications of the conjunction between religious belief and language upon which his work relies. (28-29)

The "popular form of religious renewal" that Hungerford describes is the Charismatic movement, which interests her because of its ability to intensify religious belief while still being open to a variety of specific doctrinal content. This is relevant for understanding Ginsberg—and Hungerford's reading of 1960s religious culture—because it reflects the belief, as she says in reference to Alan Watts's ideas, that "propositional content was the

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enemy of true religious experience" (44). In other words, for Ginsberg as for the Charismatics, the religious experience was the linguistic experience of either chanting or speaking in tongues, an experience that is remarkably accommodating to America's entrenched pluralism—and which in turn makes it possible to read political critique in Ginsberg's work in this strain. For example, discussing a poem that wishes Merry Christmas to an apparently indiscriminate list of political, cultural, and religious figures, Hungerford argues that "the poet's hail of cosmic good will" evinces a political "critique of a peculiar kind, in keeping with the version of pluralism on display in the Charismatic movement. It is critique that allows opposing voices to continue speaking and that does not argue against, seek to unite, or seek even to interpret, opposing points of view" (50-51).

After leaving Ginsberg behind, Hungerford provides a chapter-length study of Don DeLillo, "The Latin Mass of Language." This chapter is especially interesting—and, to my mind, correct—because it suggests that for too long DeLillo's work has been conflated with the textbook postmodernism of *White Noise* (1985). While *White Noise* is no doubt an achievement, and handy for American novel surveys or postmodernism courses, Hungerford rightly suggests that it is atypical of DeLillo's larger career. For the most part, she argues, his work is invested in literature's "immanent transcendence" in ways that do not exactly mirror Ginsberg's, but that make DeLillo look quite different from a cartoon postmodernist that blanches at any shred of foundationalism. Whereas she reads Ginsberg through his interest in Hinduism, Hungerford points to DeLillo's Catholic background, which she invokes not to cast him as a religious writer on the order of Flannery O'Connor or Walker Percy, but rather to help explain how he "ultimately transfers a version of mysticism from the Catholic context into the literary one" (53). DeLillo's novels, she claims, "translate religious structures into literary ones without an intervening secularism," a thing they can do "because they imagine language in a way that preserves a specifically Catholic understanding of transcendent experience while drifting far from Catholic traditions and themes." In order to elaborate what she means by a "Catholic understanding of transcendent experience," Hungerford reads DeLillo's novels within the context of 1960s controversies about whether mass should be held in Latin or the vernacular. In Hungerford's account, one argument against the vernacular mass was that the Catholic religious experience was centered not on the

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content of the mass—knowing what the words mean—but on the sounds and experience of the mass: "For those who opposed the use of Latin, lack of comprehension was simply that and necessarily bad . . . [but] for those in favor of the Latin, the barrier to understanding facilitated a mystical relation to the language, a relation that reinforced the transubstantial, incarnational logic of other elements of the mass" (57). Lest readers find such debates "literally parochial," Hungerford connects them to some major currents in 1960s thought, notably Marshall McLuhan's oft-repeated dictum "the medium is the message"—after all, his idea was that the

> modern media have their effects on American culture not because of what they say, but because of how they say it. . . . McLuhan's analysis of media and, secondarily, of religion and liturgy, locates a mystical reality both within the media of human communication and also, importantly, beyond media's communicative functions. (58)

It is within this context that Hungerford analyzes DeLillo's novels—principally *Libra*, *Mao II*, *The Names*, and *Underworld*—to explore how a "mystical understanding of language" (59) operates in them.

For Hungerford, DeLillo shares with Ginsberg an interest in the "materiality of language" (60), so that *Mao II* recuperates "an analogy between the Latin mass and the novel" that is accomplished "by virtue of the linguistic freedom DeLillo imagines can arise out of the formulae of cult speech once fanatical beliefs have been replaced by the sheer capacity for belief" (66). Likewise *Underworld*, whose ending features not the atheist nuns of *White Noise* but a nun whose "embrace of a mystical vision . . . is rewarded with a very Catholic-looking afterlife on the Internet" (xx), exemplifies DeLillo's broad question regarding the religious power of language: "how religion that is abandoned in most respects can persist in a literary form" (74).

Following her close analysis of the works of Ginsberg and DeLillo, Hungerford's fourth chapter, "The Bible and Illiterature," first explores how debates about teaching the Bible in public schools foregrounded the idea that it could be variously interpretable. From there she notes the renewal of interest in the Bible by major literary critics in the 1970s and 1980s, and then offers readings of Cormac McCarthy and Toni Morrison that demonstrate how they appropriate Biblical language to confer that "numinous" sense so hard to articulate in conventional terms. As she writes:

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> In their dealings with the Bible, literary critics and novelists in this period work out the relationship between literature and the sacred in ways that make literature akin to scripture. To imagine literature as scripture is not the same as imagining it as supernaturally powerful on the model of the Hindu chant, as Ginsberg does, or as transcendent on the model of the Latin mass, as DeLillo does, though all these impulses share a recognizable desire to connect the religious to the literary. (76)

In working through these connections, Hungerford offers numerous moments of insight, one of the most compelling of which concerns Frank Kermode's *The Genesis of Secrecy* (1979). As Hungerford writes, Kermode "postulates a hermeneutic practice revolving around the 'secrecy' of texts, a practice that always privileges latent over apparent meaning" (82). She connects this idea to *Postmodern Belief*'s larger claims about how the sacred is made manifest in literature: "For Kermode, secrecy is what makes literature literary" (83), an idea that links him to DeLillo because both find "spiritual mystery at the heart of the literary enterprise." Ultimately, then,

> *The Genesis of Secrecy* connects the Bible with modern fiction through an interpretive mode that is more numinous than rational, that equates the "business" of writing modern fiction with that of writing scripture, and that is driven by a late-twentieth-century interest in opacity and latent meaning. (84)

Such moments stand among the surprising pleasures of *Postmodern Belief* because they offer alternative explanations for the undeniably strident interest in "opacity and latent meaning" we find in a range of critical and literary texts of the late twentieth century.

This diversion through postwar literary criticism sets up the analyses of McCarthy and Morrison later in the chapter. After a brilliant reading of a scene in McCarthy's *Child of God* in which a blacksmith tells in detail how to form an axe-blade ("We have been shown," Hungerford writes, "how to make something out of words, how to forge something from the stubborn material of language, from the obscure words, archaisms, and vocabularies of technique that McCarthy excavates here and throughout his writing" [88]), Hungerford moves on to *Blood Meridian*, the novel which secured McCarthy's place in the postwar American canon. Taking up the challenge of those critics who see in the novel's style "something

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close to nonsense," Hungerford argues that "the meaninglessness of its metaphysical and philosophical discourses . . . reveal[s] the counterintuitive way the novel aspires to the authoritative status of scripture" (90). According to Hungerford, "*Blood Meridian* is designed to make us feel, above all, like God is speaking. . . . This is Bible as style, as a tone of authority as opposed to authoritative argument or history or supernatural claim" (95). *Blood Meridian* has always been a head scratcher for me personally, but *Postmodern Belief* has given me a new way of understanding that book, if not a new appreciation for it—something that is one of the best things one can hope for from literary criticism.

Hungerford's argument also helps explain why the supernatural has proven a recurring element in Morrison's writing. Working through novels such as *The Bluest Eye, Song of Solomon,* and *Beloved,* Hungerford argues that

> the notion of supernatural reading effaces the work of the author, [while] at the same time the resulting mystification of the author suggests an otherworldly expertise or access to the spiritual. . . . Morrison seeks to replace white possession of the Bible, and its cultural and spiritual authority, with an authority based in the illiterate's possession of that sacred book, in the process maintaining—and, more importantly, deploying—the ultimate privilege accorded to the Bible in Western culture. (96)

For readers who have wondered how Morrison's ghosts and mystical happenings jibe with a postmodern sensibility, this argument turns her novels into another powerful example of Hungerford's general re-reading of postmodernism.

Her final chapter, "The Literary Practice of Belief," looks at writers "invested in particular belief" (121). To this end, she examines Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping, Gilead,* and *Home* to show "how discourses of belief become religious practices, and how literature—both the novel as a narrative form and various poetic structures [Robinson] uses within narrative—comes to catalyze this communion between approaches to religion currently held apart in scholarly work on religion." Hungerford holds Robinson's novels up against another, more popular way "the literary" has "reimagine[d] belief as practice," the best-selling *Left Behind* novels written by evangelical Christians Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins.

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which explicitly describe a post-Rapture world with the ultimate aim of winning converts. Bringing together readings of Robinson and the *Left Behind* books offers a necessary complication to Hungerford's argument because it helps bring into focus how "the Christian practitioner in America . . . cannot live religiously without on occasion trying to articulate that knowledge," insofar as "articulating the knowledge is part of the practice" (112).

In her brief conclusion, Hungerford reflects on what it means that her chosen writers "aim to 'reenchant' the literary world, urging it away from rationality and realism even when working in realist modes, insisting on a species of meaning that is not reducible to historical context and cannot be fully perceived even by the most sublimely literate reader" (132-33). This understanding of literature would help us not only rethink the postmodern, but also question more generally how we value and evaluate literature as we work through the legacies of postmodernism. "Poststructuralism," Hungerford writes,

> questioned the literary artifact as such, the power of the author, the metaphysical capacities of literature, the grand narrative, and the possibility of meaning; the culture wars questioned the aesthetic and ideological assumptions assumed to underlie the traditional literary canon; the reading public, even that segment educated to appreciate modernist literature, began to fall away from reading—from reading books, at least. The writers I have considered here, both novelists and critics, seek a version of literary authority closely allied to the ambitions of modernism—to reveal in art the large-scale structures of the world as well as the very texture of consciousness, to make literature a secular religion and critics its priestly caste. (136)

This account does the double duty of reinvesting both literature and criticism with a signal importance that is hard to describe—a lingering difficulty that is part of the point. In the course of rethinking postmodernism, proposing fresh readings of key postwar writers, and arguing for a new conceptualization of late-twentieth-century religious belief, *Postmodern Belief* also tackles one of the trickiest projects of all, theorizing—and then defending—those slippery "somethings" that make literature literary.

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Feminism, Copyright, and the Paradox of Rights

Pink Pirates: Contemporary American Women Writers and Copyright
by Caren Irr
Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2010. 220 pages

Mitchum Huehls

In their recent and already influential introduction to "surface reading"—a counter-symptomatic practice that foregrounds "what insists on being looked at rather than what we must train ourselves to see through" (9)—Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus identify six different ways that literary scholars engage the surface of texts, one of which includes the "practice of critical description." As Best and Marcus explain, those adopting this critical stance see no need to "translate the text into a theoretical or historical metalanguage" (11) because texts carry with them the ability to tell us about themselves. Accordingly, those who are skeptical of that ability—those symptomatic readers plumbing textual depths to reveal things the text doesn't even know about itself—fail to recognize that such readings actually reveal more about themselves as readers than they do about their objects of inquiry. Although Caren Irr voices no explicit allegiance to critical description as such, her new book, *Pink Pirates: Contemporary American Women Writers and Copyright,* is at its best when we hear both history and literature speaking for themselves.

The history in question here is the history of Anglo-American copyright law, stretching from the 1710 British Statute of Anne, which first established authors as property owners, to intellectual property suits targeting illegal internet downloaders. Within this span, Irr specifically focuses on the difficult and often contradictory relationships that women have had to the institution of copyright, beginning with a thorough "feminist history of copyright" in the book's long opening chapter. While Irr's history details the vexed subject positions that nearly two centuries of US women writers established in relation to copyright law and its underpinning patriarchal institutions such as liberalism, marriage, and publishing, her readings focus primarily on contemporary, not historical, literature. After making a case for the gender inequity constitutive of copyright law's proprietary construction of authorship, creativity, and readership,

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Irr discusses the novels of four contemporary women writers—Ursula Le Guin, Andrea Barrett, Kathy Acker, and Leslie Marmon Silko—as examples of resistance to "the dominant forms of literary property in late-twentieth-century America." While Irr acknowledges that such acts of literary resistance remain symbolic to the extent that they occur "within the safe parameters of the copyrighted work" (12) she contends that they also produce real effects. As practitioners of "pink piracy," Irr suggests, these four authors challenge "U.S. copyright statutes" and "advance a critique of property" by providing "visions of the commons rooted in precapitalist or noncapitalist cultures—especially the indigenous cultures of the Americas" (2).

Irr's talent for critical description characterizes both her historical and her literary analyses. First, she refuses to condemn the various ways—many of which would be anathema to contemporary feminists—that historical women writers adapted to the gendered constraints of copyright law. Second, she refuses to critique the rather antiquated, second-wave-feminist arguments about maternity, nature, and female community that suffuse each of the contemporary novels (save for Acker's) she discusses in the ensuing four chapters. This generous engagement with history and literature—truly expansive work which details the various ways that contemporary women novelists build on a centuries-old tradition of alternative relationships to copyright law—leaves ample room for *Pink Pirates* to garner a broad readership. Its triangulation of copyright law, feminist politics, and contemporary fiction, along with Irr's remarkably lucid prose, makes it potentially productive reading not just for feminist literary critics, but also for legal scholars committed to more humanistic orientations toward the law and for literary scholars interested in fiction's unique treatment of legal debates. Indeed, in its focus on contemporary women writers, *Pink Pirates* nicely complements and extends the important work done by Paul Saint-Amour in *The Copyrights* (2003), which examines how primarily male authors engaged intellectual property debates dominant between 1830 and 1930.[1]

But it's not just the attention to contemporary women writers that establishes Irr's work as a productive extension of Saint-Amour's, it's also the compelling backstory to those contemporary trends that she lays out in her feminist history of copyright. The first station in Irr's literary-historical genealogy of the pink pirate lies in Britain, where the Statute of Anne first articulates a proprietary notion of creative authorship. Drawing

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on Carol Pateman's important feminist critique of liberalism in *The Sexual Contract*, Irr contends that the founding documents of liberalism in general and of copyright law in particular are constitutively patriarchal: "they understand the modern concept of the author as deriving from a strongly gendered vision of the autonomous self" (23). In this primary "insistence on a single form of authorship," however, Irr also locates the early "back channels of a nonproprietary pirate practice" (25). Following liberalism across the Atlantic to eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century America, Irr details the various compromises required of women writers living under coverture, the arrangement under which women became the legal property of their husbands. Despite the fact that they were denied any formal property rights of their own, Irr argues, "the exclusion of women writers from legitimate ownership of copyright neither prevented their entrance into the literary marketplace nor interfered with their support of one another at individual and institutional levels" (29)—support that Irr views as another important step in the genealogy of pink piracy.

These largely symbolic acts of piracy become more explicit in the middle of the nineteenth century when women writers begin to secure some measure of copyright and the economic benefits that flow from it. While Fanny Fern made strongly individualistic and forthright claims of proprietary ownership on her own behalf, for example, authors such as Harriet Beecher Stowe and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps filtered such claims through the more acceptable language of domesticity and female friendship. Both approaches, however, represented the declining power of coverture and the newly intentional and strategic assertion of proprietary rights for women writers. This trajectory only accelerated in the second half of the nineteenth century, as states gradually began to recognize women as potential property holders rather than as property themselves. From this point on, Irr suggests, "individual women's property rights could plausibly be understood as deriving from their status as citizens rather than from their status as married women" (36). Nevertheless, even as male authors assertively negotiated contracts with an increasingly industrialized publishing industry (in one of the book's many inside-baseball tidbits, Irr reports that William Dean Howells went so far as to "[retain] ownership of the plates from which his texts were printed, renting them back to the publisher so that he and his heirs received income from the printing of subsequent editions" [39]), Irr finds that women writers generally accepted the industry's standard contract, "underexercised their rights" (40),

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and "perpetuated a convention of feminine reticence regarding business practice" (41).

Once Irr's feminist history of copyright arrives in the second half of the twentieth century, it describes an interesting shift: "as copyright expanded to new media and applied to smaller units of a text, the text became valuable not necessarily because it replicated an individual author's complete and original vision, but rather because it reproduced copyrighted icons in part or whole" (42). (Irr's example here is Mattel's vigilant defense of Barbie's supposedly wholesome embodiment of femininity.) With this shift in copyright's focus, the publishing industry became ever more commercial as it aggressively pursued the subsidiary profitability of texts. This "large-scale structural change in the industry" also required two new jobs—the literary agent and the in-house coordinator of subsidiary rights—which were both disproportionately staffed by women. Because neither job carried the prestige of editing, which remained dominated by men, Irr explains, this shift "created new opportunities for women while at the same time replicating a gendered hierarchy of labor and status." Consequently, in early second-wave feminist texts like Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* and Mary McCarthy's *The Group*, we find paradoxical scenarios in which "working in publishing—not being an author oneself—serves as the sign of liberation, maturation, and recognition for central female characters" (46).

Taken as a whole, Irr's feminist history of copyright highlights women's generally "uneasy relationship to property" and reveals "the long and sometimes twisted history of women's exclusion from and subjection to property law in the Anglo-American tradition" (51). And it is within and against this history that Le Guin, Barrett, Acker, and Silko write, ultimately reshaping "the constraints experienced by creative women of the past" into "lively opportunities for creativity" in the present. While Irr—who brackets her analyses of these authors with discussions of contemporaneous legal debates in copyright law—clearly sees these four authors writing with a general sense of women's historically vexed relationship to copyright, she does not claim that they intentionally write with these particular legal debates in mind. Rather, she takes these debates as the conceptual framework for her thorough textual analyses, each of which suggests that literature, with its more flexible forms and content, moves beyond some of the impasses and contradictions in copyright law that legal discourse struggles to resolve.

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For example, Irr opens her discussion of Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* with an analysis of dispossessed motherhood more broadly—that is, the ways in which mothers are denied the full status of citizen-subjects. According to Irr, different forms of second-wave feminism responded to such dispossession in various ways: liberal feminists invested maternity with the values of possessive individualism; difference feminists went in the opposite direction and articulated a communal alternative to masculine notions of property; and socialist feminists reformulated motherhood as affective labor contributing to the material reproduction of the capitalist state (56–57). Through an analysis of a 1976 court case, *Reyher v. Children's Television Workshop,* Irr locates these same feminist debates in copyright law: sometimes the nonproprietary commons—in this instance, the commons of folklore, with its generic plots and morals about motherhood and maternity—is judged "an open reservoir" without copyright protection and at other times it is deemed "a closed territory" (62) subject to proprietary legal constraints. Irr sees Le Guin intervening obliquely in this controversy by developing, in *The Dispossessed,* a radically alternative conception of motherhood. Instead of positioning motherhood on the spectrum that stretches between individual ownership and a communal commons, Le Guin treats maternity as a gift. According to Irr, the language of the gift stands in a tangential relationship to the debate over the commons, one which opens motherhood to both men and women while replacing the discourse of property with that of "responsibility and affection" (74).

The subsequent three chapters of *Pink Pirates* follow a similar conceptual schema. The legal question in the third chapter revolves around the "piracy paradox" which applies to industries like fashion in which "creativity is both plentiful and profitable despite the absence of copyright protections" (80). Nevertheless, when a group of Inuit women complained in 1999 that Donna Karan International had resold handmade Inuit clothes with a Donna Karan label attached, they firmly asserted their intellectual property rights over the designs and styles of the garments. But as Irr explains, casting the debate exclusively in the discourse of private property ignores the fact that women on both sides of the dispute "share[d] a fundamentally unstable relationship to copyright law and to one another because they all inhabit[ed] different corners of the pink and piratical commons" (80). While the Inuits and DKI executives did not recognize this commonality, Andrea Barrett does, insofar as her novel

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The Voyage of the Narwhal "explores the interdependence of women very differently situated in the global division of labor and imagines a perhaps overly harmonious empathetic union bringing them to the commons together" (103).

In place of empathetic union, Kathy Acker's *Pussy, King of the Pirates* gives us carnal union as a space prior to and outside the law of copyright. In her chapter on Acker, Irr foregrounds the legal debate concerning whether property or free speech rights should be privileged in determining the legal status of disputed representations of women. Irr explains here that courts have historically favored the property rights of those like *Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders, Inc.*, which owns the intellectual property rights to representations of the cheerleaders, over the free speech rights of those like *Pussycat Cinema, Ltd.*, which produced the pornographic film *Debbie Does Dallas* in which a protagonist appears in a "Texas Cowgirl" cheerleading uniform closely resembling theirs. While some feminists fear that property rights tacitly regulate sexual expression, others point out that property rights effectively mitigate the rampant sexualization of women. Irr contends, however, that Acker's work, like Le Guin's and Barrett's, transcends copyright's contradictory arguments, in this case by imagining female sexuality beyond the legal language of rights altogether.

Finally, in a chapter on Leslie Marmon Silko's *Gardens in the Dunes*, Irr engages the debate between an individualistic and "race-blind" account of copyright and an approach that pays attention to race and culture by emphasizing group rights. The former standpoint refuses to consider the minority status of a given object of parody when determining whether such parody constitutes fair use; the latter position addresses that problem but, as Irr notes, its "communitarian approach to group rights might restrict in-group creativity" (137). In the face of yet another paradox, Irr turns to Silko's novel, which removes this debate from its either/or logic and instead "evaluate[s] the aesthetic purpose and social effect of borrowing" and "analyze[s] the extraeconomic factors in play in assertions of a right to culture" (138). In short, the novel makes the case that borrowing cultural forms and traditions in newly affirmative ways is acceptable while appropriating cultural knowledge and artifacts for economic gain is not.

Although each author chooses different themes and forms to rethink the impasses of copyright law, Irr's core argument across these four chapters is remarkably consistent: all four authors "imagine a renewed tradition of feminine exteriority and positive piracy," "producing a strong account of an ideally better world beyond the scope of intellectual property"

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(158). To be frank, this argumentative consistency becomes rather tedious: the "diverse genres and styles" through which this common argument is articulated do not ground any strong analytical distinctions, and despite the implied conceptual connection to the contemporaneous court cases, the four literary chapters do not deliver on an early promise to establish "a brief chronology" (15) that might historicize women's relation to copyright at the end of the twentieth century. Of course, it's not really Irr's fault that her texts make remarkably similar claims. In fact, as I said earlier, I admire Irr's willingness to let these texts speak the frequently essentializing second-wave feminist language that they want to speak.

At times, however, Irr adopts her authors' arguments as her own, in the process symptomatically revealing just how difficult it is to read asymptomatically. For example, when Irr tells us that her authors "demonstrate a commitment to recovering the figure of the pink pirate and making her the subject of the commons" (159), she is practicing what we might call immanent description. But when she laments that Le Guin's "alternative vision of motherhood and feminist antiproperty" (75) has "not redirected public discourse on intellectual property" (74), or when she champions the "shared utopian project of rethinking property" (159) that her authors articulate, she slides into immanent critique. Consequently, *Pink Pirates* not only demonstrates that a certain subset of contemporary women writers holds a specific set of political beliefs about the injustice of private property and the utopian possibility of the commons, but implies throughout that we should subscribe to those politics as well.

This is problematic only because the strength of Irr's historical argument depends on the refreshing political openness that she brings to her descriptions of women's historically vexed relationship to copyright. In particular, Irr refuses in her opening historical chapter to interpret either the liberal property rights that flow from possessive individualism or the strong communities born of a shared commons as inherently positive or negative. For example, Irr compellingly argues that we should not see women's historical reluctance to assert their post-coverture property rights as some kind of problematic "feminine self-effacement" (33). Instead, Irr notes that such anachronistic evaluations "assume that individual self-assertion is the necessary ideal that women were institutionally prevented from reaching." Similarly, in an important footnote, Irr explains that "women writers' continuing attachment to networks of personal affiliation and their disavowal of business knowledge can both be understood

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as reproducing aspects of a precapitalist or noncapitalist commons, as well as perpetuating the forms of social domination coded as coverture" (174). In other words, Irr recognizes that it doesn't make any sense to adopt an ideologically rigid position on women's historical relationship to private property and the commons for the simple fact that sometimes those relationships are desirable and helpful, and sometimes they are not.

This acknowledgement of historical complexity recedes, however, once *Pink Pirates* turns its attention to contemporary women writers. In her readings of these writers Irr does seem to take sides, coming down against the private property rights defined by possessive individualism and in favor of the communal utopian ideals of pink piracy. But as Wendy Brown has argued, "The question of the liberatory or egalitarian force of rights is always historically and culturally circumscribed; rights have no inherently political semiotic, no innate capacity either to advance or impede radical democratic ideals" (97). Consequently, "it makes little sense to argue for [rights] or against them separately from an analysis of the historical conditions, social powers, and political discourses with which they converge or which they interdict" (98). Although we sense throughout *Pink Pirates* that Irr is rooting for piracy over privacy, Irr's historical discussions do take into account "the historical conditions, social powers, and political discourses" mediating women's negotiation of copyright law; her chapters on contemporary women's literature do not.

As the ideological opposite of private property, the collective commons is not a utopian ideal external to the logic of property; it's one half of a mutually constitutive relationship between property and nonproperty, individualism and communalism. Irr seems to acknowledge such inextricability when, early in her feminist history of copyright, she writes, "Practices of the commons are partially (if negatively) recognized by the law when they are described as piracy" (25). That this is the case explains why, even though the contemporary novels treated in *Pink Pirates* most certainly say what Irr says they say, we should be more skeptical about whether they actually do what Irr says they do—specifically, that they think beyond the legal paradoxes born of the tension between private property and the commons. Instead, it strikes me as much more likely that the commons of the contemporary pink pirate represents just another moment in the long history of the vacillating value of property and rights, be they private and individual or communal and collective. If the legal and the illegal, the owned and the pirated, the private and the communal

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are always mutually constitutive sides of the same coin, then it's not that the qualitative value of piracy and privacy vacillate throughout history until pink piracy finally emerges as a clearly preferable utopian ideal at the end of the twentieth century. Instead, I'd suggest, we are living through a historical moment in which the apparent hegemony of neoliberalism has incited a counterdiscourse that endorses all things communal and collective with the same fervidly blind insistence with which neoliberalism endorses all things private and market-based. We uncritically adopt that counterdiscourse as the truth, or even as a progressive utopian ideal, at our own peril.

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Notes

1. Saint-Amour's more recent edited volume *Copyright & Modernism* vastly expands the demographic and generic scope of *The Copyvrights* but limits its historical purview to modernism proper.

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Further Directions for South African Literary Studies

Bulletproof: Afterlives of Anticolonial Prophecy in South Africa and Beyond

by Jennifer Wenzel
Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009. 328 pages

Mukti Lakhi Mangharam

In 1856, in the eastern cape of South Africa, a young girl from the Xhosa tribe, Nongqawuse, went to fetch water from a pool near the mouth of a river. When she returned, Nongqawuse told her uncle and guardian, Mhlakaza, a Xhosa priest, that she had met the spirits of her ancestors. The ancestors had decreed that the Xhosa people should destroy their crops and slaughter their cattle. In return, the ancestors would sweep the British colonialists into the sea and fill the granaries and kraals. Xhosa civilization would then flourish. Mhlakaza relayed this message to the chief, who ordered his followers to obey the prophecy. The cattle killing frenzy that resulted caused a famine; the population of the Xhosa nation dropped to a quarter of what it had been and British rule was strengthened in the region.

Jennifer Wenzel's ambitious literary history *Bulletproof* examines various textual interpretations of the Xhosa cattle killing during the colonial, apartheid, and post-apartheid periods. Tracking the way the cattle killing has resurfaced in multiple anti-colonial moments, Wenzel explores how the event enters a Southern African and transnational global imaginary. She is interested not in the failure of the prophecy but in the persistence of its prophetic vision, in its afterlives—which she calls "the continuing resonances in the present of failed social movements and the dreams that drove them" (5). She examines the radical potential of prophecies in different historical moments, even after they fail, and asks: What dreams do these failures keep alive? And how do these dreams illuminate the present and shape the future? In asking such questions, Wenzel's work on the cattle killing contests pessimistic readings of the event in the present. For instance she challenges Achille Mbembe's diagnosis of a contemporary

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"Nongqawuse syndrome," a suicidal impulse made up of a dangerous mix of populism, nativism, and millenarianism that emerges from an imperfect, incomplete post-apartheid "liberation." Unlike Mbembe, Wenzel excavates a broad range of interpretations that see the cattle killing as something other than irrational self-destruction. It can also, she argues, be read as "utopian surplus," capable of "generating an alternative meaning of what our world might be" (189).

This novel approach to representations of the cattle killing uses a largely unexplored archive to juxtapose disparate texts with each other, exploring their inter-textual links. In the process, Wenzel rethinks the writing of South African historiography and literatures, as well as post-colonial theory more generally, emphasizing entangled temporalities and histories rather than the discursive differences between the colonizers and the colonized that have featured prominently in previous accounts.[1] After a brief chapter summary of *Bulletproof,* I examine Wenzel's insightful meditations on this "genuine intertextuality," an approach that reads narratives from different temporalities to yield compelling theorizations of alternative modernities and anti-colonial resistance. I conclude that while Wenzel successfully conveys the complexities of the discourse surrounding the cattle killing, her readings would have benefited from a consideration of oral Xhosa texts surrounding the event.

Wenzel's five chapters focus on different representations of the cattle killing. The first looks at nineteenth-century accounts by colonial administrators, European missionaries, and Tiyo Soga, a Xhosa Christian minister, to argue that these stories were involved in a broader project to subjugate the Xhosa people. Wenzel shows that literacy was a crucial engine of the European civilizing mission. The second chapter analyzes intertextual webs surrounding the cattle killing in H.I.E Dhlomo's play *The Girl Who Killed to Save* (1936) to demonstrate the ambivalence of elite, mission-educated Africans of the era, revealing the power dynamics between African authors and mission presses. Both chapters feature texts that posit the cattle killing's failure as a decisive attempt that makes way for something new, whether it be an opportunity to consolidate the subjugation of the Xhosa peoples, or the emergence of a new South African nationalism. Wenzel's third chapter considers the ideas of "remembered prophecy" and "prophetic memory" alongside key protest writings that documented oppression and appealed for morality, including Sol Plaatje's *Native Life in South Africa* (1916). She also examines challenges to protest

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writing during the anti-apartheid struggle of the 1970s and 80s. While Plaatje critiqued an aberrational present made up of a broken time, later texts such as Njabulo Ndebele's *Rediscovery of the Ordinary* reclaimed the linear temporalities of everyday lived experience as an anti-apartheid strategy. Wenzel thus ponders the different temporal frameworks involved in imagining justice in South Africa. Wenzel's fourth chapter considers two post-apartheid novels, Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother* (1998) and Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* (2000) to ask how the cattle killing illuminates the end of apartheid, reading the transition through ideas of heterotemporality and unfailure. Finally, Wenzel turns to the cattle killing's afterlives, analyzing how texts such as John Edgar Wideman's novel *The Cattle Killing* (1996) and Brett Bailey's play *The Prophet* (1999) place the event in transnational, global imaginaries that reimagine modernity on their own terms.

Wenzel explores this literature through a variety of innovative approaches. For instance, she draws on unpublished materials as well as obscure published texts to "listen for occluded voices" (72), reading nineteenth-century accounts of the cattle killing by British commissioners, African and British missionaries, and white settler teachers and printers aiming to write literary set pieces. Wenzel examines these materials to theorize a non-linear practice of reading, or "genuine intertextuality," that grasps how texts engage with one another in contexts of unequal power (74–75). This involves what she calls "reading alongside" (98), or tracing intricate connections among disparate texts in very different temporal contexts that nevertheless echo and draw on each other. For instance, Wenzel examines missionary, colonial, and indigenous texts constellated around Dhlomo's play about the cattle killing, *The Girl Who Killed to Save* (1936). These texts include writings as diverse as a nineteenth-century narrative by the wife of a British commissioner and the anti-colonial narrative of Soga, an African missionary.

Wenzel's notion of genuine intertextuality is influenced by, and also informs, debates about whether literary history in South Africa is best approached from a centrifugal perspective concerned with fragmentation or a centripetal perspective committed to integration. The literary scholar Michael Chapman has asserted that "despite racial and linguistic division, we have all been part of the same narrative story" (qtd. in Wenzel 74), a shared narrative that predates the formation of South Africa as a political entity in 1910. For Chapman, integrating literary history would foster

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national reconciliation; literary criticism is a "social activity concerned with justice." While Wenzel doesn't agree with a centripetal impulse that, for Van Wyk Smith, assumes a "rockbed of complex intertextuality and commonality of purpose" (qtd. in Wenzel 74), she argues for a more diffuse version of intertextuality that draws on Roland Barthes's conception of the intertextual. Quoting Barthes, Wenzel describes this approach as one in which "every text is woven entirely with citations, references, echoes, cultural languages, antecedent or contemporary, which cut across it through and through in a vast stereophony" (75). For Wenzel, this vision of reading realizes the most radical implications of Walter Ong's notion of texts as infinitely capable of resurrection. Wenzel's approach to intertextuality, in examining the common grounds of narratives from disparate contexts and unequal positions of power, largely succeeds in its effort to provide a nuanced version of Chapman's vision of an integrative literary history.

Wenzel's methodology of genuine intertextuality often mirrors and maps the insightful conclusions she reaches about her subject matter. For instance, her non-linear practice of reading, in putting texts from different temporalities in conversation with each other, reflects one of her key arguments, that millennial visions such as the cattle killing prophecy kept a pre-colonial past alive in the present by imagining an acolonial future. Both her texts and her conclusions, then, emphasize a productive heterotemporality: the cattle killing imaginary springs from and represents a vision that is "not merely anticolonial but also acolonial—impossibly, simultaneously pre- and postcolonial" (2). The radical temporality of these prophecies exceeds the constraints of linear narrative, judging contemporary oppression against visions of liberation, often ones rooted in the supposedly failed resistance of the past. Because past failure can yield radical results in the present and future, Wenzel addresses prophecy that has not yet come to fruition as a mode of "unfailure" (161). Unfailure signifies a radical patience that keeps past dreams alive as dynamic inspiration for future movements. With this in mind, Wenzel asks how the formal capacities of narrative approximate a layered experience of time that understands past hopes and failures as alive in the present. For instance, her reading of Mda's *Heart of Redness* demonstrates how its narrative structure juxtaposes nineteenth-century events with twentieth-century ones, depicting a plurality of coexisting times. Several of the characters in the novel believe that the past, specifically the cattle killing, is what causes the present and what makes it intelligible (181).

Wenzel's heterotemporal approach to these histories resonates beyond

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scholarship on the cattle killing. Her development of the links between temporality and narrative form has implications for the writing of South African historiography more generally. Wenzel builds on David Attwell's emphasis on writing the story of South Africa to reflect one's temporal place(s) in history, or in the present and future, rather than on a discursive emphasis on racial sameness and difference (Wenzel 25). Wenzel's arguments also parallel similar arguments about "entanglement," or, as Sarah Nuttall puts it, a way of telling the story of the post-apartheid era in terms of the intricate overlaps that mark raced lives and historical eras, rather than within the register of difference (1).

Wenzel's emphasis on temporal entanglement, on bringing past and present into communication so that they distort and remake one another, is, in fact, also closely related to Mbembe's argument that as an age "the postcolony encloses multiple durées made up of discontinuities, reversals, inertias, and swings that overlay one another, interpenetrate one another" (14). Mbembe calls this time "an interlocking of presents, pasts, and futures that retain their depths of other presents, pasts and futures, each age bearing, altering and maintaining the previous ones" (16). To focus on the time of entanglement, Mbembe shows, is to repudiate not only linear models but also the ignorance that they make possible and the extremism to which they have repeatedly given rise. Non-linearity, according to Mbembe, is positive. Wenzel would agree; drawing on Atwell's "optimism of the long term" (Wenzel 8), she outlines the happy idea that what is unrealized in one moment might yet come to pass in a different form.

Wenzel's entangled intertextual study of the cattle killing, in bringing together African and settler narratives, also builds on scholarship on alternative modernities that aims to rethink modernity as multiple and global rather than singular and European. While prophetic resistance movements are generally seen as rejections of colonial modernity, Wenzel demonstrates that the cattle killing was a "transnational" construct that revealed an engagement with its own kinds of modern imaginaries. Not only was the prophecy pan-African, it also refused to be limited by the geographical space of Africa. Believers used "black" to denote anti-imperial resistance rather than skin color so that even Indians and Russians became "black" (197).

In the process of pluralizing modernity through a study of the cattle killing, Wenzel takes on board Dipesh Chakrabarty's critique of the developmentalist assumptions of historicism, noting that even if we are to understand "gods and spirits as existentially coeval with the human"

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rather than as anachronistic remnants of the pre-modern, the challenge remains to "render this enchanted world into our disenchanted prose" (qtd. in Wenzel 11). In an attempt to do precisely this, Wenzel notes that Xhosa prophecies and their global genealogies imagined a modernity of magical, transnational phenomena rather than mundane, anti-imperialist affiliation. The cattle killing prophecy projected its ideas of global solidarity into a longer timeframe by positing Russians not merely as Black, but as Xhosa ancestors returned to deliver their descendants. Thus, Wenzel argues against interpreting these anti-colonial movements as non-modern simply because they cannot be traced through a European or Westernized genealogy of rationalism and liberalism. Gods and spirits can be the historical agents of modernity as well.

Moreover, to "render this enchanted world into our disenchanted prose," Wenzel builds on critics like Adam Ashforth, who notes "the ambiguity of writing about domination in a context where the power to encode the past in writing is itself both a product of domination and a form of domination" (qtd. in Wenzel 11, 37). Wenzel thus insists that one must place Xhosa ways of speaking of their past in dialogue with accounts produced according to Western academic conventions of research (178-179). This would be a mode of writing premised upon equality rather than upon subordinating one kind of "storying" of the past to another.

Paying "close attention to Xhosa ways of speaking of the past" (179), Wenzel juxtaposes disparate materials written and circulated by colonized peoples amongst themselves, looking at how texts by different anti-colonialist nationalists separated in time by over a century, including Soga, Dhlomo, and Nelson Mandela, talked to each other. Through this reading practice, Wenzel "remaps anti-imperialism to take account of connections among colonized peoples, rather than merely tracing unidirectional lines of influence between Europe and its colonies" (5). One of the real benefits that *Bulletproof* yields, then, is a way of thinking about postcolonial studies outside of the often limited approaches made possible by colonial discourse theory. The latter, in simply examining how Enlightenment discourses were appropriated by anti-colonial nationalisms, often overlooks the alternative intertextualities that colonized peoples drew on in order to articulate their resistance.

Wenzel's focus on colonized narratives, however, remains restricted to the writings of literate Africans. She justifies her exclusion of oral Xhosa

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texts by contesting the sharp scholarly division between orality and literacy, contending that elite literate Africans clearly drew on oral texts to formulate the substance of their literacies:

> However much one might want to counter versions of the past accreted in the colonial archive with oral and/or indigenous understandings, the examples of the isiXhosa anthology *Zemk'inkomo magwalandini* and the anti-imperialist journal *Lotus* signal the difficulty of establishing impermeable distinctions between indigenous and colonial, literary and historical, oral and written. (37)

While I agree with Wenzel that solid distinctions between orality and literacy are anachronistic and inadvisable analytic categories, I suggest that commonalities between the oral and the written, and continuities between "traditional" narratives and "modern" ones, are better demonstrated through a combined analysis of both technologies. In other words, I suggest beginning with the pre-colonial oralities of the Xhosa masses, and then tracing the ways in which these oralities influenced elite narratives.

The importance of including these oral texts is suggested by Wenzel's analysis of the writings of relatively privileged Africans such as William Wellington Gqoba, "a preacher, poet, and journalist" and, in Wenzel's words, a "member of the mission educated elite" (33). Gqoba published his narrative about the cattle killing in two installments of *Isigidimi*, his newspaper for the dissemination of literacy among the Xhosa. An abridged version appeared in *Zemk'inkomo magwalandini* (There go your cattle, you cowards), a 1906 anthology edited by the Xhosa intellectual W. B. Rubusana that reprinted oral praise poetry (izibongo) and prose and poetry from Xhosa newspapers like *Isigidimi* (Wenzel 33). This anthology included other Xhosa oral texts surrounding the cattle killing, including praise poems addressed to the "illiterate" Xhosa masses that spoke of Nongqawuse. Wenzel's argument would have been enhanced by an exploration of these sources, which reveal that contemporaries of Nongqawuse often spoke of her in praise poetry, repeatedly accusing her of having given birth in monstrous ways.[2] In doing so, such poems speak to Wenzel's focus on perceptions of the prophecy as giving birth to utopic and dystopic presents and futures. And, in later years, David Livingstone Phakamile Yali-Manisi (1926-1999), a significant pre-apartheid, apartheid, and post-apartheid praise poet, also took Nongqawuse and the cattle

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killing as subjects of his praises (Opland 31–38). Such oral texts would have provided Wenzel with rich sources for theorizing the intertextual multiplicity of meanings surrounding the cattle killing for Xhosa peoples of all social positions, in the past and in the post-apartheid present.

More specifically, the omission of Xhosa oral sources leads to two problems with Wenzel's argument. First, it undermines Wenzel's aim to "remap anti-imperialism to take account of connections among colonized peoples, rather than merely tracing unidirectional lines of influence between Europe and its colonies" (5). In not examining the orality associated with "illiterate peasant rebels" or "charismatic chiefs and prophets," Wenzel is only able to trace continuities between the early and later resistances of nationalist elites rather than shedding light on how the Xhosa masses, the "primordial communities," also influenced more mainstream discourse about the cattle killing movement.

This omission in turn undermines Wenzel's argument that twentieth-century anti-colonial nationalism was continuous with earlier modes of resistance. While Wenzel condemns the standard historical narrative in which "an urbanizing proletariat or literate elite replaces illiterate peasant rebels; new, multiethnic institutions like trade unions, political parties, and welfare associations replace primordial communities led by charismatic chiefs or prophets; and the desire for modernization replaces retrograde magical movements to restore a lost golden age" (9), her privileging of the writings of the literate elite inadvertently reproduces this narrative. The absence of non-elite subaltern voices from Wenzel's account, that is, suggests that their earlier modes of resistance were largely replaced by the derivative discourses of twentieth-century anti-colonial nationalisms.

Despite this lack of attention to indigenous oral expression surrounding the cattle killing, however, Wenzel's *Bulletproof* emerges as a valuable addition to South African literary history. Wenzel's scholarship offers a rigorous rethinking of South African literary methodologies and historical issues, and her fine-grained readings challenge the linear temporalities of South African historiography, attending instead to how literature and historical materials talk to each other. In the process, these readings unsettle the telling of the South African past solely in terms of discursive differences and historical ruptures. *Bulletproof* largely succeeds in bringing the past alive in the present and, through what it chooses to exclude as much as what it chooses to include, illuminates potential futures for South African literary scholarship.

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Notes

1. In doing so, Wenzel's analysis takes its place with other contemporaneous texts, such as Sarah Nuttall's *Entanglement*, that also emphasize shared histories and narratives over racial and discursive differences between colonizers and colonized.

2. See, for example, the following praise poems about Nongqawuse recorded in W. B. Rubusana's 1906 collection of izibongo:

> She's the dung beetle giving birth, the leguaan that swells, the hyena leaking milk. (379)
>
> I arrived as leguaans were secluding the breast-feeding mother. The year that the leguaan's daughter was initiated through marriage, throwing a spear into the cattle kraal. (382)

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Mrs. Dalloway's Animals and the Humanist Laboratory

Vicki Tromanhauser

Mrs. Dalloway's sustained critique of the structures of hierarchy and dominance that underpin patriarchy, imperialism, and the class system extends to species difference and the obsession with mastery that determines the boundary between the human and nonhuman. The novel explores the various social institutions and spaces that actively, even violently, produce the idealized concept of the human, a concept that the sciences of Woolf's time were steadily, if ambivalently, eroding.[1] This distinction between human and nonhuman orders of being has been called "the most devastating imaginary of our epoch" (Esposito 161), and the growing interest in this threshold across a range of disciplines from literary studies and philosophy to the social and biological sciences has focused attention on complex ethical issues regarding medical research, zoological captivity, the consumption and production of food, and environmental sustainibility. As Margot Norris explains, "In the process of reorienting the human subject within its metaphysical and ethical cosmos, these theoretical resources have begun to recuperate the human *qua* animal from ideological repression, marginalization, and demonization" (9). This recuperation not only appreciates the human animal as a being distinct from the cultural entity, but also challenges the very idea that the domains of the social and cultural are exclusively human.

When Clarissa Dalloway ruminates on her love of life throughout a June day in 1923, she pauses to savor her "secret deposit of exquisite moments" and to acknowledge the debt she owes to those who have given her life its particular luster: one must "repay in daily life to servants, yes, to dogs and canaries, above all to Richard her husband, who was the foundation of it" (28–29). For all Clarissa's biocentric exuberance, what informs

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her generous gratitude toward those other sentient beings, whether human or nonhuman, who support her way of life is an unshakeable belief that it is singularly "blessed and purified" (28). Woolf's oft-cited intention "to criticise the social system" (*Diary* 248) in *Mrs. Dalloway* extends to a confounding of the categories of species, as in the above quotation, where servants are separated from dogs and canaries only by a frivolous affirmation. The social hostess clears her conscience over a debt of gratitude, the repayment of which she endlessly defers, to the animal that produces her exalted way of life, regardless of the class, ethnicity, or even species of that animal.

The figure of the human surfaces in *Mrs. Dalloway* in a number of animal guises: the birds that chirp in Greek to the war veteran Septimus; the hatred Clarissa experiences as a hoofed brute within herself; and the resemblance of the German outcast Doris Kilman to a "prehistoric monster" (123), for example. Through these and other unreconstructed images of "man" as the animal of the polis, Woolf unearths the very fantasy by which humanity constructs its exalted status through the violent repression of the animal and animalistic. As a deliberate counter to this, the offices of the Harley Street nerve specialist Sir William Bradshaw provide an experimental laboratory in which the idea of the human is artificially produced through the doctor's division of the populace into different zones of life whose breeding can be regulated and "unsocial impulses" (99) contained.

Ultimately what is at stake, as in much of Woolf's fiction, is the changing shape of human character as its unexpected relations come to light. Set in London following Britain's victory in the first global war, the novel depicts the humanistic paradigm at the center of the empire that drives its self-image. At the same time, Woolf suggests the culture's demise through the very social strategies and sciences—medical, eugenical, and evolutionary—that work to define its place at the top of a great chain of being, itself understood as a geo-political as well as metaphysical hierarchy. The social process that surrounds these sciences—imagined by both Bradshaw and Clarissa as a kind of natural selection—becomes legible in Clarissa's party for London's elite, which, like the ancestral history Richard plans to write of Lady Bruton's family, memorializes a ruling class and species whose moment of unchallenged precedence has passed. This paper aims to show how Woolf imagines the laboratory and the party as analogous social spaces that compulsively and neurotically produce such

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an idealized image of culture. These two spaces of socialization produce this metaphysical ideal not in isolation, however, but rather in concert, as they permeate and work implicitly to reinforce each other. In parallel to this more familiar social mediation, human character changes shape in the novel through the representation of animalistic qualities in humans and through the representation of human attributes such as speech, reason, and feeling in animals. Revealing attributes presumed to be exclusive to the human as proper to the nonhuman animal, Woolf attempts to close the affective distance between human and animal, or, in the language of Mr. Ramsay's philosophy, "subject and object."

Animals abound in *Mrs. Dalloway*, whether figuratively as metaphors for human characters or literally as the Dalloways' beloved companions, one of whom can be heard howling during Clarissa's party. But animals provoke special anxiety when they can be seen looking out from human faces. Septimus Warren Smith, an avid reader of Darwin and a Great War veteran who has seen all manner of human atrocities, is confronted by the sight of a Skye terrier suddenly metamorphosing into a man before his eyes—a disconcerting compression of "eons of evolution" (66) that suggestively preserves the animal predecessor alongside its human descendent. As though glimpsing something out of H. G. Wells's surgical theater of horrors in *The Island of Doctor Moreau*,[2] Septimus then witnesses the man turn back into a dog, through which Woolf intimates the Janus-faced nature of his vision, prophetically adumbrating the future landscape of an ever-evolving species and challenging the anthropocentric moorings of subjectivity itself.

For Woolf, as for Septimus, Darwin's evolutionary theory provided the conceptual apparatus for thinking "scientifically" about the natural continuum of life, even as it supplied a vocabulary for asserting and articulating differences within that continuum. In her recent investigation of the animal in British literary modernism Carrie Rohman identifies a "residual humanism" (3) that persists in both evolutionary and psychoanalytic discourses to forestall or compensate for the blows to human exceptionality that the Darwinian and Freudian discoveries delivered. As Rohman points out, both the Darwinian and Freudian imaginings of the human individual feature a struggle to transcend animality, whether that of one's evolutionary heritage or that residing in the unconscious, teeming with brute sexual and aggressive drives (7).

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In Freud's essay entitled "One of the Difficulties of Psycho-Analysis" (1917), published by the Hogarth Press the same year as *Mrs. Dalloway* in the fourth volume of the *Collected Papers*,[3] Freud characterizes the history of scientific advance as a series of human decenterings, identifying three "blows" or "wounds" to humanity's primary narcissism, what he calls "the self-love of humanity" (4:350): the first is the Copernican or "cosmological" (351) blow that displaced earth from the center of the universe; the second was the Darwinian blow which challenged human precedence over the other animals by exposing their common biological origins, and the third and "most wounding" blow, he argues, was the "psychological," effectively intensifying and extending the second by granting Darwin's ancestral animal a permanent place within the human unconscious.

Woolf complained to a friend of the difficulties of writing *Mrs. Dalloway* with the floor of her house in Tavistock Square riddled with the pages of Freud's *Collected Papers*. Glancing down at the staggering piles, she was additionally dismayed to discover "large hoof marks half way through" one of the reams of paper (*Letters* 3:119). Freud's human beast left its hoof marks in *Mrs. Dalloway,* and, faced with the Germanophilic Doris Kilman, Clarissa feels something of his rough beast stir within her: "It rasped her, though, to have stirring about in her this brutal monster! to hear twigs cracking and feel hooves planted down in the depths of that leaf-encumbered forest, the soul" (12). "Degradingly poor" (120), trapped within an ugly and "unlovable body" that "no clothes suited" (126), and overmastered by the demands of the flesh, Doris Kilman is the quivering and perspiring image of Freud's traumatized being, that triply wounded animal that calls itself "human."

In her attempt to conquer the frailties of the flesh, Kilman enacts humanity's traditional repudiation of its animal constitution in favor of its supposed affinity with the divine, its aspiration to become, in the words of one of Kilman's fellow worshippers in Westminster Abbey, "a soul cut out of immaterial substance" (131). In her failed or incomplete conversion, unable to cast off the brute body and sever her animal flesh from the immortal soul, Kilman enacts the impossibility of Cartesian divisions: "But she had not triumphed; she had not mastered the flesh" (125).

Like the allergic reaction she provokes in Clarissa, Doris Kilman induces in others a Freudian anxiety of incomplete transformation from animal quadruped to erect *anthropos* and of thus failing to assume the full human dignity exemplified for Clarissa in Lady Bexborough's "perfectly

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upright and stoical bearing" (9). The psychoanalytic narrative of human acculturation is founded upon what Freud called "organic repression" (*Standard* XXI: 99), the subjugation of those very "fleshly desires" (125) with which Kilman is in perpetual struggle, even resenting a child in the café of the Army and Navy stores for taking the last pink cake, since "her food was all she lived for" (126).

For Freud, humanity's decisive adoption of an erect posture, a phylogenetic development he sees recapitulated in the individual's psychic maturation, occasions a series of developments through which humanity sublimates its organic, animal aspects, beginning with the devaluation of the olfactory senses and the consequent promotion of the visual (a cultural trend toward cleanliness deriving from the repugnance toward excretory functions), proceeding to the founding of the family, and concluding with the formation of human civilization (*Standard* XXI: 99-100). Carrie Rohman suggests that Freudian psychoanalysis in the early twentieth century represents "a logical response to the threats of evolutionary theory," so that if "Darwinism releases the spectre of animality for British modernists," then "psychoanalysis attempts to capture and tame it" (63).

In this vein, Freud's elaboration of the theory of organic repression passes breathlessly from the "person" who offends other people for lacking hygiene, thus "showing no consideration for them," to the dog, man's "most faithful friend in the animal world," whose name becomes a term of abuse for its reliance on the sense of smell and unabashed relation to its excrement and sexual functions (*Standard* XXI: 100). Lurching her way through the novel, "with her hat askew, very red in the face" (129), Doris Kilman remains encumbered by a grotesque physical body that in its "largeness, robustness, and power" literally obstructs the passage of the other worshippers in the Abbey, and Mr. Fletcher, prevented from getting by her in the pew, "could not help being a little distressed by the poor lady's disorder; her hair down; her parcel on the floor" (131). In contrast with the "bodiless" light of the Abbey (130), Kilman is all body, and this unyielding physicality might be the aspect of her that most "kills man" in its transcendental conception, her "overmastering desire" to "unmask" the likes of Clarissa (122).

Excluded from the guest list for the Dalloways' party, Kilman is left sniffing about the borders of human fellowship, outside the family fold of civilization much like another lesser cousin, Ellie Henderson, the poor spinster whom Clarissa snubs for "not even caring to hold herself up-

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right" (164). In this light, we might see Clarissa's "transcendental" (149) theories about life in London as a means of wresting the immortal soul from the jaws of evolutionary science and contending with the animals in our midst, those who fall below the threshold of the fully human or, in her terms, "perfectly upright" (128). Clarissa's love of life in general—"life; London; this moment of June" (4)—is conditioned by a desire to protect it against certain forms of life in particular that threaten to dilute its vibrancy, what she calls its "divine vitality" (7). So with her "horror of death" (9) Clarissa invents an animistic conception of London which allows her to claim "odd affinities" with other urban lives—"the fat lady in the cab," "some man behind a counter" (149)—in whom her soul might survive after death.

Mindful of the gaps in Clarissa's transcendental theory, Peter Walsh recalls the Victorian science that occasioned it: "possibly she said to herself, As we are a doomed race, chained to a sinking ship (her favorite reading as a girl was Huxley and Tyndall, and they were fond of these nautical metaphors), as the whole thing is a bad joke, let us, at any rate, do our part; mitigate the sufferings of our fellow-prisoners (Huxley again); decorate the dungeon with flowers and air-cushions; be as decent as we possibly can" (76). Clarissa's vision of a doomed human race and the alternative morality of her "atheist's religion" are appropriately informed by the work of anatomist Thomas Henry Huxley, a friend of Woolf's father Leslie Stephen, who coined the term "agnostic" and whose book *Evidence as to Man's Place in Nature* (1863) is an anxious meditation on the ontological status of the human in light of evolutionary science. The book's frontispiece features a skeletal procession of Man's pithecoid family, with a gibbon, orangutan, chimpanzee, and gorilla stooping behind him. Unearthing evidence of the physiological proximity of humans to the so-called "man-like" apes like the chimpanzee and the gorilla, Huxley asks provocatively, "is Man so different from any of these Apes that he must form an order by himself? Or does he differ less from them than they differ from one another, and hence must take his place in the same order with them?" (85-86).

Consolidating Man and Ape within the same order does not eradicate taxonomical distinctions, so much as shift the frontiers of such categories to cultural distinctions, where, Huxley suggests, "Men differ more widely from one another than they do from the Apes" (95). Philip Armstrong identifies a central paradox of the nineteenth-century life sciences, where

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studies in comparative physiology and anatomy were "abolishing any absolute biological distinction between humankind and other types of organism," while "the scientific paradigm reinstated an epistemological abyss between humans and all other organisms, by means of its conviction that only humans were capable of transcending the objective world through empirical investigation and abstract reflection" (83-84). Thus with characteristic rhetorical finesse Huxley could maintain "the vastness of the gulf between civilized man and the brutes" since "whether *from* them or not, he is assuredly not *of* them" (130). And in Woolf's novel Mr. Bentley, one of the Londoners strolling in Regent's Park, employs "the Mendelian theory," contemporaneous with Darwinian evolution maintaining the genetic transmission of biological traits, to bolster his fantasy that the skywriting aeroplane affirms man's "determination . . . to get outside his body . . . by means of thought" (27).

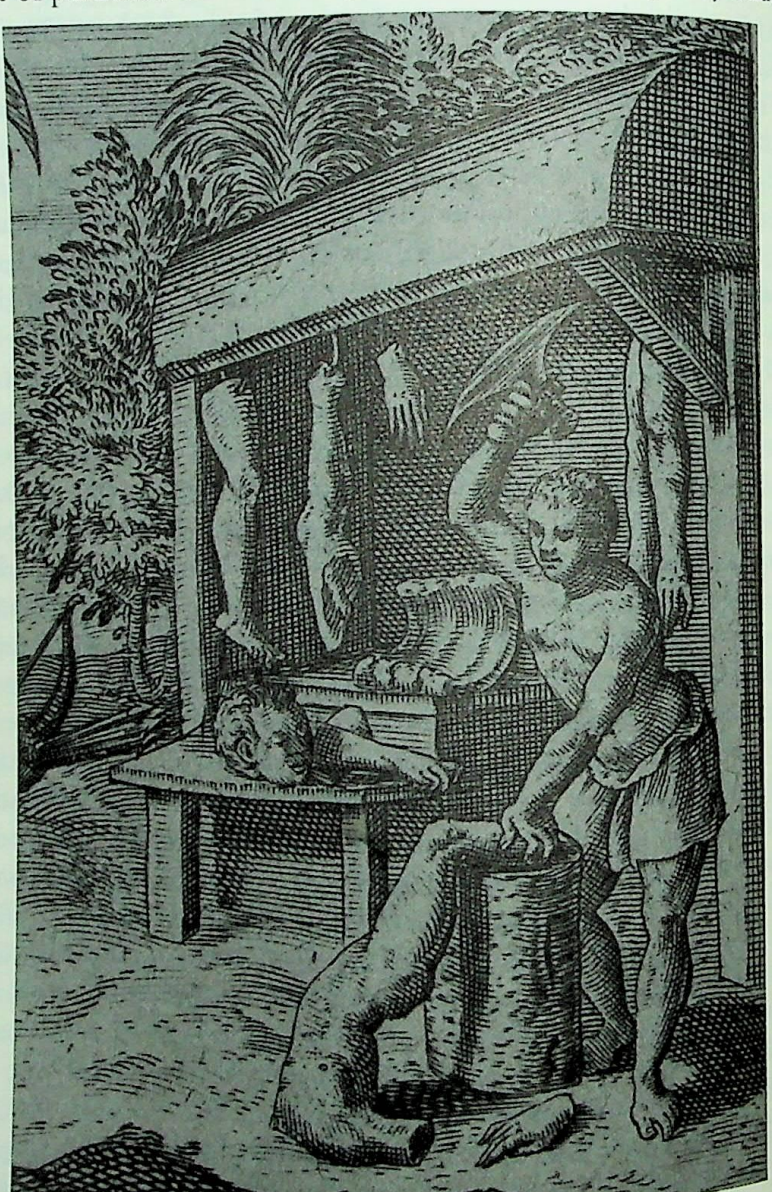
Huxley likewise celebrates a transcendental vision of the human in the chapter "On the Relations of Man to the Lower Animals," which he concludes with a paean to "the great Alps and Andes of the living world—Man" (132), demonstrating the metaphorical facility for which Clarissa admired his writing. Here the image of Man, having been dragged back by anatomical science through the primeval mud of his biological origins, emerges in all its prosthetic divinity upon the "roseate peaks" of civilized existence, "raised by inward forces to that place of proud and seemingly inaccessible glory" (131). The majestic splendor of the Alps and their centrality to a tradition of Victorian mountaineering, male camaraderie, and transcendental consciousness was familiar to Woolf through the Alpine "idolatry" practiced by her father, a hiking companion of Huxley and fellow agnostic.[4] Language itself continued to form for Huxley the crucial if fragile distinction between *Homo* and *Pithecus*: "But a race of dumb men, deprived of all communication with those who could speak, would be little indeed removed from brutes. And the moral and intellectual difference between them and ourselves would be practically infinite, though the naturalist should not be able to find a single shadow of even specific structural difference" (qtd. in Wallace 88, *Lectures* 149).

It seems that Huxley's gift for metaphor was not all Clarissa inherited from the anatomist's finely crafted descriptions of anthropoid and pithecoid physiology. Lady Bruton perceives the social hostess as a dissecting anatomist and ruminates on how she "had never seen the sense of cutting people up, as Clarissa Dalloway did—cutting them up and sticking them together again; not at any rate when one was sixty-two" (101).

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Immediately preceding the chapter "On the Relations of Man to the Lower Animals," Huxley introduces a woodcut of an African cannibal's butcher shop from a sixteenth-century travel narrative, which, although Huxley intended as satiric, in its suggestion of human savagery was the object of particular alarm and disgust among his contemporary readers.[5]



Phillipum Pigafettam, *Vera Descriptio Regni Africani Quod Tam Ab Incolis Quam Lufitanis Congus,* Frankfurt 1624 (*Argumentum* XII). *Reprinted with permission of the British Library. Board, shelfmark 215.c.11.*

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In spite of the outrage to Victorian decency, the wit of Huxley's indulgent insertion depends upon an entrenched and unshakeable belief in the Englishman's place at the top of a natural chain of being, even as he amasses evidence of human affinity with the great apes. And yet the comic relief that the illustration affords Huxley's readers suggests an entire network of para-evolutionary associations in the Victorian imagination of sacrifice, cannibalism, the atavistic human, and the racial other. Remarking on the same illustration in her comprehensive study of the science of classification from the late eighteenth through nineteenth centuries, Harriet Ritvo observes, "so axiomatic was the opposition between Britishness and barbarism that it could serve as the basis of humor that also reified the increasingly rigid human taxonomies of the late nineteenth century" (212). No sooner is the integrity of the human species disarticulated in the butcher's stall of evolutionary science, then its shadowy imago reasserts itself with greater intensity in the repression of other human subjects, in this case the "cannibalistic" African colonial whose dehumanization sustains Huxley's joke with his English audience.

Much like the dissevered head of the cannibal's victim in Huxley's woodcut that seems to gaze upon its body's dismemberment on the tree stump, Septimus sees the human form not as a composed totality, but a loose assemblage of parts. As the character in the novel most in touch with nonhuman life, Septimus appropriates the canine perspective of the Skye terrier that had "snuffed his trousers" (66) earlier in Regent's Park, fixing its sight upon a single leg detached from the rest of the body and the sensual gratification it might offer. Seated on the couch in his Bloomsbury lodgings, he cautiously takes in the figure of his wife in discrete pieces: "He shaded his eyes so that he might see only a little of her face at a time, first the chin, then the nose, then the forehead, in case it were deformed, or had some terrible mark on it" (139).

Septimus's view of the human from the perspective of the animal constitutes the novel's greatest challenge to scientific accounts of homo sapiens and occasions a rethinking of what it means to be a human in modernity. When he fears Rezia's deformity, what he projects is a diminished humanity, one marked terribly by its ambiguous relation to her species, as if she had been marked out for sacrifice. Central to recent theoretical investigations of the question of the animal has been Derrida's elaboration of the "sacrificial structure" of human identity formation in the Western philosophical tradition ("Eating Well" 112). At the origin of

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Judeo-Christian moral conscience, he argues, is a prohibition that denies animals since the injunction "Thou shalt not kill" has never extended to the nonhuman animal or to the living in general. As the preeminently typological species, humanity at once arrogates to itself a conceptual understanding of kinds and categories and supplies a justification for violence against animals through a non-criminal putting to death. Derrida contends in "Eating Well" that such ethical proscriptions "remain profound humanisms to the extent that they do not sacrifice sacrifice" (113). Offering up the animal upon the altar of the transcendental human subject, the ritually sanctioned protocols of sacrifice generate a space of residual violence that gets contained and disavowed. This sacrificial operation not only determines relations among different species, but mediates relations within a single species as well by providing a strategy for separating out and violently repressing signs of animality within the human community, or in Sir William Bradshaw's eugenically inflected parlance, containing "unsocial impulses" and regulating "the lack of good blood" (99).[6]

The discourse of species that persistently underpins Western conceptions of subjectivity and sociality, Cary Wolfe argues, "relies on the tacit agreement that the full transcendence of the 'human' requires the sacrifice of the 'animal' and the animalistic, which in turn makes possible a symbolic economy in which we can engage in what Derrida will call a 'noncriminal putting to death' of other *humans* as well by marking *them* as animal" (6). The particular danger of such a model of subjectivity, and its conferral of privileges to a transcendent class or order of being, lies in its tremendous mobility across the natural and social spectra as a "ready-made" symbolic system that can be versatilely deployed "to countenance violence against the social other of *whatever* species—or gender, or race, or class, or sexual difference" (8).

In the psychiatrist's consulting room in *Mrs. Dalloway,* "human nature" emerges in all its repressed animality. Sir William Bradshaw's Harley Street office becomes the experimental laboratory in which Clarissa's transcendental theory is mechanically and "scientifically" produced. Possessed of a "natural respect for breeding and clothing, which shabbiness nettled" (95), the good doctor is custodian to the national hygiene. The narrator's derisory epithet for Bradshaw, "the priest of science" (92), echoes the term "the new priesthood" commonly deployed by Victorian antivivisection feminists to denounce experimental physiologists for their cruelty toward animals and other living subjects.[7] Like Wells's Dr. Moreau, Woolf's psy-

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chiatrist plays a kind of cultural vivisectionist, who extends his medical expertise to a doctrine of social governance rooted in evolutionary ideas of harmony and balance, or, as he explains, "proportion": "Worshipping proportion, Sir William not only prospered himself but made England prosper, secluded her lunatics, forbade childbirth, penalised despair, made it impossible for the unfit to propagate their views until they, too, shared his sense of proportion" (97). Bradshaw's worshipful language as scientific "priest" testifies to the mysticism of a categorical ideal more easily asserted than rationally explained or scientifically defended, not least in its utterly negating refusal to accommodate the messy reality of "childbirth." The terms of the properly social existence—sane, human, well-proportioned, eugenically "fit"—appear not as natural and given, but as the elaborate production of the psychiatrist's diagnostic will to power. In the scientific conversions of Bradshaw's consulting room, the very composition of London society is remade and renewed. Analyzing the technology of the laboratory, Bruno Latour maintains that one of its greatest innovations is the succession of displacements and changes of scale it effects. By way of this "metaphorical drift," Latour explains, "no one can say *where the laboratory is* and *where society is*" (154).

Huxley's career was defined by his advocacy of the laboratory over the museum as the appropriate site for scientific research (Alt 42-43; White 56-58, 65-66), in addition to his reputation as Darwin's bulldog, the vociferous champion and popularizer of the secular science of evolution over creationism). Such advocacy represented a theoretical shift in scientific study away from the mere cataloguing of dead specimens toward the experimental practices of the new biology, as Paul White has argued, effectively "transporting the pastoral virtues of the field to the enclosed and largely urban space of the institutional laboratory" (56), conducive at once to physiological investigation and to experimentation with live subjects. In Sir William Bradshaw's dismissal of the untrained, amateur diagnosis of the general practitioner Dr. Holmes, Woolf references the hostility of an increasingly specialized culture of professionals operating within the laboratory toward the antiquated practices of the layman in the field.[8]

If elsewhere Woolf's fiction upholds the experimental potential of the lab and its possibility as an emancipatory outlet for women (see Alt 109-114, 123-27), Bradshaw's consulting room fuses the worst aspects of Victorian taxonomy and new biological experimentation, so that Clarissa,

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having once accompanied a friend to his office, recalls her "relief to get out to the street again!" (178), as if fearful of falling under the figurative scalpel of his "exacting science" (98). The doctor's confidence in his "lightning skill" and "almost infallible accuracy in diagnosis" couples self-importance with the systematized and classificatory habits of the taxonomic tradition of the life sciences for which Woolf repeatedly expressed contempt.[9] It is the dogmatism and precise cataloguing of the taxonomizing mind that prompts Rezia's agonized realization that "Sir William Bradshaw was not a nice man" (96) and Clarissa's intuitive sense that "one wouldn't like Sir William to see one unhappy. No; not that man" (178).

Through the deep suspicion with which the other characters regard Sir William in his Harley Street office, a space that empowers him to reduce people to categorizable types, Woolf suggests the dangers of the scientific laboratory and its humanistic technology. One of the important contributions of the emergent interdisciplinary field of critical animal studies is its uncovering of what Kimberly Benston identifies as the "metaphysical imperatives" (550) that organize the space of the laboratory and drive its practices, not only articulating and classifying the basic terms of existence but actively producing them in a diagnostic decision that is incontestable because juridically authorized. "In short this living or not living is an affair of our own" (99), Sir William's patients might protest. "But there they were mistaken," he corrects them; as he explains to Septimus's wife: "He had threatened to kill himself. There was no alternative. It was a question of law" (94). Effectively deputized as an agent of the common weal and protector of England's biological stock, the doctor collapses physician and sovereign into a single entity, a fusion that signals what Giorgio Agamben identifies as characteristic of modernity's entwining of the biological sciences and the state (*Homo Sacer* 154-59). The sinister byproduct of this fusion is the twentieth century's proliferation of extrapolitical spaces in which, like the prison, the concentration camp, or Bradshaw's sanatorium in Surrey, the standard legal and ethical protections are suspended and the political subject appears as nothing more than bare life.[10]

Thus two substitutive practices at the heart of the production of humanity—anthropomorphism and sacrifice—meet in Bradshaw's consulting room. He employs the language and logic of sacrifice (evoking the ideals of "family affection; honour; courage" [99] that drove young men like Septimus to war), but in terms subtly recalibrated to address the anxieties of the postwar world, where the external threat posed by an

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international enemy is translated into autoimmunitary terms—the need to protect the "good blood" of the populace from the taint of degenerate breeds.[11] As Benston argues, "while anthropomorphism and sacrifice might seem, in historical terms, polar substitutive practices (human for animal vs. animal for human, respectively), ideologically they converge as technologies for making and enlarging 'humanity' by effacing (writing over, killing) animality, a process in which violence is euphemized and transvalued in celebration of idealized being" (551). In the scientific conversions of the lab, Bradshaw's medical prerogative operates upon a series of sacrificial exchanges: the life of the individual patient for the health of the greater socius, the particular "case" for the general and juridical "law," and, to borrow a distinction Agamben draws from the ancient Greek, *zoê* (simple biological life) for *bios* (politically qualified existence). The psychiatrist's experimental laboratory perpetuates the logic of sacrifice that undergirds transcendental humanism in its Cartesian imagining (partitioning human from animal, mind from body, reason from affect, etc.) through its production of representative samples or surrogates for its human beneficiaries: experimental subjects at once sufficiently similar to serve as substitutes but appreciably different so as not to obligate our full ethical consideration or elicit our compassion.

The moment he proscriptively defines the human, issuing medical decisions about the cases that come before him, Sir William becomes an animal himself: "He swooped; he devoured. He shut people up. It was this combination of decision and humanity that endeared Sir William so greatly to the relations of his victims" (99-100). The great doctor not only demonstrates the extent to which the identity of the human is the product of a decision—one that must be obsessively revisited with every patient he sees—but also suggests the way in which "humanity" produces itself from within the domain of the animal as an act of predatory selection, "swooping" upon and "devouring" the "victims" it forcibly silences and suppresses. Septimus's postwar treatment exposes the brutality that drives such an anthropocentric fantasy, and confirms his suspicion that man is the animal of the polis:

> For the truth is (let [Rezia] ignore it) that human beings have neither kindness, nor faith, nor charity beyond what serves to increase the pleasure of the moment. They hunt in packs. Their packs scour the desert and vanish screaming into the wilderness. They desert the fallen. They are plastered over with grimaces. (87)

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Reminiscent of the dream that haunts Freud's Wolf Man—a pack of white wolves sitting in a tree stare at him with devouring eyes—Septimus's zoo-anthropological vision reverses the phylogenetic narrative of the evolution of human society from the instinctual animal pack.[12]

Another of Sir William's "victims," Lady Bradshaw now sits inert in her husband's motorcar ensconced in "grey furs" (92) or appears "in ostrich feathers" (99) frozen in a picture that hangs in Sir William's consulting room like a collected specimen, and ultimately reminds Clarissa at the party of a zoo animal in captivity, "balancing like a sea-lion at the edge of its tank" (178), another specimen for her husband's scientific bestiary. Lady Bradshaw at once serves as mascot for Sir William's "exacting science" (96), in its attempt to purge the neurotic animal from our midst, and, as she occupies progressively more enclosed spaces—she "cramped, squeezed, pared, pruned, drew back, peeped through" (98)—enacts the plight of the animal in modernity.

The "verdict of human nature" (89) expels Septimus from the polis, but the "great distinction" with which his superior officers recognize he served in the war reopens the great divide between him and the animals, effectively placing him outside the zoo (94). Thus what we see in Septimus's exceptionality is not simply his otherness in the conventional terms of humanist metaphysics—insanity or the lack of proportion, being mentally "unfit" or the insensible beast that "could not feel"—but instead humanity's own repressed animality, what is in the human more than the human.

Septimus's ambiguous status as a cultural, psychological, and even ontological type in *Mrs. Dalloway* destabilizes the human as a natural category, which in turn calls into question his status as a speaking subject. In other words, the capacity of language to confer subjectivity on the human is troubled by what happens to language around him. While language remained for Huxley, as it was for Descartes, a distinguishing sign of human rationality, Woolf undermines such a connection in the novel from within the symbolic operations of metaphor. Many of the characters in the novel resemble birds and take on birdlike movements, as several critics have noted,[13] but only Septimus hears them sing in ancient Greek, evoking the linguistic order associated with the origins of Western rationalism—as the Greek word *logos*, signifying both speech and reason, signals. What Septimus hears in the birds singing in Greek—a foreign tongue he cannot understand since he read "Aeschylus (translated)" (86)—is an opacity within language itself. In her essay "On Not Knowing Greek" (1925),

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Woolf famously calls Greek "the perfect language" largely because we cannot know what it means, "we do not know how the words sounded" and are "for ever making up some notion of the meaning of Greek . . . with what slight resemblance to the real meaning of Greek, who shall say?" (*Common Reader* 23).

The birds chirping in Greek speak to an inhuman or nonhuman element within language itself that activates our instincts more than our rational or analytic faculties. Part of Woolf's fascination with the dead language she had studied for nearly two decades derives from its primal energy—the raw emotional intensity she hears in Cassandra's "naked cry" (*Common Reader* 26), and the brutal physicality of words that have "the power to cut and wound and excite" (31). Septimus's auditory hallucination, then, is at once madly literal and symbolic:

> He waited. He listened. A sparrow perched on the railing opposite chirped Septimus, Septimus, four or five times over and went on, drawing its notes out, to sing freshly and piercingly in Greek words how there is no crime and, joined by another sparrow, they sang in voices prolonged and piercing in Greek words, from trees in the meadow of life beyond a river where the dead walk, how there is no death. (24)

Speaking a dead language quickened to life, the sparrows chirp in proper names and, like a Keatsian nightingale, in timeless truths rather than figures or metaphors. And yet the lyrical beauty of their song is capable of sending the mind on fantastical flights, transporting Septimus to an unearthly or otherworldly paradise where "there is no crime," "there is no death." In this light, the radical implication for language of this Greek birdsong is not just that speech may no longer be exclusively human, but that speaking may in fact signal that one is no longer human. In her discussion of Woolf's Greek notebooks and translation of Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*, Yopi Prins argues that what is opaque, unpronounceable, untranslatable in the Greek "could be idealized as something beyond language, but is better understood as something materialized by and in language," sounding within speech what "is lacking in sense" and "can't be grasped as meaning" (181).[14]

Septimus's vision might be seen as an anthropomorphic fantasy or fable that merely gives back to animals the speech that the natural sciences had refused them. And yet the more Septimus invests the ostensibly nonverbal space of the animal with the eloquence of human language—transforming the sonorous "chirp" into the human articulacy of "words"—the

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more his human voice assumes the inarticulacy of the *zôon alogon*, animal without speech. As he strains to decipher the meaning of the birds' song, his own voice is reduced to senseless jibber and rendered literally barbarous: "What are you saying?" (24), his wife Rezia asks uncomprehendingly. Septimus, "staring, talking aloud," is no more comprehensible to Rezia than the Regent's Park Zoo animals, whose "barking, howling" the couple can hear over the palings of their cages.[15] Moreover, Septimus's traumatized consciousness turns animals into spectral humans. As Suzette Henke points out, he mistakes the "white" shapes he sees "assembling behind the railings" for the ghost of his dead friend Evans and the apparitions of other fallen war heroes, a "hallucinatory misprision of animals in the London zoo" (150).

But the question persists, whether reinvesting animals with linguistic ability suffices to acknowledge their legitimacy of being. In an extended meditation on the place of the animal in the Western philosophical tradition, *The Animal That Therefore I Am,* Derrida suggests that in order to think beyond the anthropocentric tendency that has consistently presumed human superiority to other species, "it is *not just* a matter of asking whether one has the right to refuse the animal such and such a power . . . It *also* means asking whether what calls itself human has the right rigorously to attribute to man, which means therefore to attribute to himself, what he refuses the animal, and whether he can ever possess the *pure, rigorous, indivisible* concept, as such, of that attribution" (135). Derrida continues, "instead of simply giving speech back to the animal, or giving to the animal what the human deprives it of," such as we might find in the anthropomorphism of animal fables, a new strategy would consist "in marking that the human is, in a way, similarly 'deprived'" (160). The sparrows' mastery of an ancient language that Septimus can only access in translation blurs the increasingly fine taxonomical distinctions of evolutionary science, which while eroding the physiological bases for distinguishing between human and animal orders effectively shifted the frontier of difference from anatomy to epistemology. Denying animals the capacity for language and speech, as Brian Cummings points out, "is an attempt to shore up human rationality against the possibility of something worse than incomprehension or nonsense: to be condemned to solipsism, self-referentiality, talking to oneself, alone" (180), which is precisely how Septimus seated on the bench in Regent's Park appears to other passersby.

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Septimus's sensitivity to an avian language and sentience, however fantastical or delusionary, enlarges not only the field of language and response but of subjectivity and its claims upon human responsibility toward those creatures who might speak in a language not our own, and feel in ways that surpass our understanding. When the sparrows summon him by name, calling "Septimus, Septimus" (24), he may not understand all they have to say, but he hears the full ethical force of their appeal. His repeated insistence that "the trees were alive" (22) and that "Men must not cut down trees" (24) extends the concepts of subjectivity and consciousness to other forms of life beyond the human at the same time that it recognizes new ethical obligations toward them.[16]

When he perceives wolfish eyes gazing out from behind plastered human grimaces, hears the birds singing Greek, or witnesses a dog metamorphose into a man, we might see Septimus as a character who anthropomorphically gives the nonhuman world the contours of the human. And yet another possibility suggests itself. As a man who communes with the deceased and has himself been "lately taken from life to death" (25), Septimus haunts living London as a strange species of undead, as a being deprived of everything that ought to make him human: he cannot feel, cannot speak comprehensibly, and cannot even choose between living and dying.[17] Possessed of an impossible knowledge of both the life and afterlife of the human, Septimus enacts a crisis of witnessing akin to what Sara Guyer identifies in the testimony of Holocaust survivors. One of the enduring lessons of the camps is the indestructibility of the species despite every attempt by the SS to deprive the prisoners of the name "human." What Guyer calls "the anthropomorphism of the human" (140) emerges when the name of the human comes to signify "an infinite capacity to be destroyed." This counterintuitive operation reveals the human in all its nakedness, not as the aggregate of innumerable capacities denied the animals, but as what Guyer calls, in language reminiscent of Agamben, "a being whose life can be reduced merely to living" (68).

Within Woolf's body of writing, even the act of taking one's own life is not strictly speaking a guarantor of one's humanity. In *Flush* (1933), the fictional biography of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's cocker spaniel, Flush returns to London from Italy, following Septimus's trajectory from the Italian front after the war, and learns "that Mrs Carlyle's dog Nero had leapt from a top storey window with the intention of committing suicide," having found the strain of living under Thomas Carlyle's roof "intolerable"

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(92).[18] As Woolf's mock editorial note amplifies, Nero "sprang from the library window, and, clearing the area spikes, fell 'plash' onto the pavement" (114) to survive with no broken bones, an unsuccessful version of Septimus's suicidal plunge from the window of his Bloomsbury lodgings onto Mrs. Filmer's "area railings" (146).[19]

In contemplating the "rather melodramatic business" (145) of hurling his body from the window, Septimus self-consciously plays out a humanistic script of ritual sacrifice: "It was their idea of tragedy, not his or Rezia's (for she was with him). Holmes and Bradshaw like that sort of thing" (146). Selfless considerations enter into Septimus's practical choice of method, leading him, for example, to spare "Mrs. Filmer's nice clean bread knife with 'Bread' carved on the handle" (145). The same selflessness results ultimately in a fuller contemplation of anthropocentrism from a vantage that is decidedly outside the human, as he reflects, "He did not want to die. Life was good. The sun hot. Only human beings—what did *they* want?" (146). The gift that Septimus refers to in the ambiguous antecedent when he cries, "I'll give it you!" is of course his life, but by implication "it" is also the entire sacrificial system that he will satisfy with his death and that he reluctantly thereby acknowledges. Septimus draws attention in his reluctance to society's unwillingness to give up sacrifice. Here again we see the difficulty of escaping a humanism that founds subjectivity upon the exclusion of nonhuman forms of life and proves unable, in Derrida's phrase, to "sacrifice sacrifice."

Septimus's suicide literalizes a cultural practice of sacrifice and symbolic substitution that Sir William's priestly science seeks to mystify. And yet the function of his self-sacrifice in the novel is not to redeem a humanistic ideal through the violent repression of its brute animal double, but to restore to the human all that is imagined to be its opposite, and thus forestall Bradshaw's production of "intolerable" (180) lives. Septimus's unexpected appearance at Clarissa's party manages to restore to her celebration of life, in all its "transcendental" exuberance, the basic fact of humanity's animal being. In the little room where she retreats to contemplate Septimus's suicide, the pulse that ebbs from his dying body erupts into Clarissa's consciousness with "a thud, thud, thud" (179) to remind her "a thing there was that mattered; a thing wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life" (180). It is significantly the body in its vital animacy—the very flesh that Doris Kilman had repudiated—which serves as the means of Clarissa's reawakened ethical sensibility. Ralph

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Acampora makes a compelling case for bodily ethics, extending the sphere of moral regard across the species barrier by recognizing a "'humanimal' conviviality" (41) which, he argues, replaces rationality with compassion as the basis for moral consideration and looks beyond "the imaginative means of empathy usually appealed to" in moral discourse in order to realize a "cross-species compassion" mediated by shared corporal experiences (23).

Much of the power of this moment of spiritual and bodily convergence during Clarissa's party has been prepared for by the novel's physiological metaphors for filiations within and between species, a figural pattern through which Woolf animates connections that remain logically or narratologically tenuous. As Craig Gordon points out, the connection between the characters of Clarissa and Septimus, who never actually meet in the course of the narrative, is produced in large part through a "shared mode of nervous embodiment" (129), a corporeal language that, as if taking Septimus's cue that "one must be scientific above all things" (66), Gordon traces to the early twentieth-century bioscientific discourses of neurophysiology and psychiatry. Such nervous or somatic threads not only forge links among human characters, but between the human and nonhuman worlds: Richard senses a "spider's thread of attachment between himself and Clarissa" (112); Lady Bruton imagines "one's friends were attached to one's body . . . by a thin thread" (109-110); Doris Kilman feels the pain of her young pupil Elizabeth taking leave of her, "drawing out . . . the very entrails of her body, and stretching them as she crossed the room" (129); and Septimus feels a common vitality connecting his body with the elm trees so that "the leaves being connected by millions of fibers with his own body, there on the seat, fanned it up and down; when the branch stretched he, too, made that statement" (22). In this light, the "matter" of life throbbing from Septimus's body to Clarissa's in her vicarious experience of his suicide strips human existence of its cultural protections to reveal our mortal being in all its anguished vulnerability, so that we might, like Clarissa suddenly seeing the old lady next door, turn toward those neighbors we have too long neglected—even those who are not, or are no longer, human.

When Septimus looks out the window from which he leaps to his death and when Clarissa looks out the window of the little room in the midst of her party, both see a figure "opposite" (146, 181) looking back at them. Pointing to this symmetry, Hilary Thompson astutely observes

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that in framing these "opposite figures," the window provides a glimpse of something "impinging from another side" that "remains other but affords us a vision of ourselves beheld from beyond" (96). Two such perspectives occur to Clarissa in the little room. Septimus reminds her of the unbridgeable alterity of death, while Elizabeth's howling dog in another room of the Dalloways' house recalls her to the mortality and suffering we share with other animals. Humanity's traumatized awareness of the extent to which its being is permeated by the animal haunts all registers of social existence in the novel: from the war veteran mumbling to himself outside the Zoological Gardens in Regent's Park, to the society hostess who dreams of selecting out of the greater London population a perfectly upright species of guest, to the nerve specialist who mediates between the two through the humanistic calibrations of his psychiatric laboratory.

It is as if Clarissa were aware of the fate Woolf initially had in mind for her—"that Mrs. Dalloway was originally to kill herself, or perhaps merely to die at the end of the party" (Introduction vi). She emerges from the enclosure of the little room into an enlarged conception of human being and an understanding of everything that Septimus refuses to live with about human nature. When Clarissa opts to carry on living upon the extreme and violent terms of Septimus's death, she bears witness to the difficulty of remaining human in the company of the inhuman others who crowd in upon the party, that "offering" to what she inclusively calls "simply life" (118). Unable to endure the confinement of her little room any longer, Clarissa crosses the threshold sensing the need to return to her guests and the wealth of other living creatures that she to the last had attempted to exclude.

§

I would like to thank my colleague Stella Deen for insightful comments on an earlier draft, the audience at the 20th Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf at Georgetown College, Kentucky, for helpful questions and suggestions on a portion of the article presented there, and my undergraduate research assistant Jenna Bragas for her diligent efforts.

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Notes

1. I take my cue here from Holly Henry's pioneering analysis of the discourse of science in Woolf's writing, especially that of astronomy, which, Henry contends, introduces an aesthetic mode for exploring alien perspectives and developing what she calls "a modernist human decentering and re-scaling" (3).

2. In H. G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau,* Prendick encounters the troubling undecidability of one of Moreau's experimental creatures who, suspended in a liminal zone between animal and human, appears "the size of a man" but is "covered with a dull grey hair almost like a Skye terrier" (80). Of course, Woolf also had a pet Skye terrier named Shag in childhood.

3. See J. Howard Woolmer (26). The essay reappears in the *Standard Edition* XVII:137-44, translated by James Strachey under the title "A Difficulty in the Path of Psycho-Analysis," although I quote here from the earlier Joan Riviere translation available to Woolf.

4. See Leslie Stephen, *The Playground of Europe* (1895), p. 281.

5. The illustration so offended the delicate sensibility of the naturalist Hugh Falconer, that "he would let no young Lady look at it," as Joseph Hooker complained in a letter to Charles Darwin (26 February 1863; qtd. in White 63).

6. Bradshaw's professional oath is ultimately to the life of the socius not that of the individual patient, which, he takes pains to point out to Septimus, is not "an affair of [one's] own" (99) but "a question of law" that answers to "the police and the good of society" (94).

7. For an account of the nineteenth-century debates surrounding the practices of experimental physiologists in the laboratory and of feminist opposition to the male-dominated culture of Victorian laboratory-based science, see Rose. The term "the new priesthood" was coined in 1893 by the novelist Marie Louise de la Ramée, who used the pseudonym "Ouida," in *The New Review*, volume 8.

8. Christina Alt's recent study of Woolf's fascination with the contemporary developments of the life sciences has persuasively demonstrated her keen awareness of the scientific debates that took shape at the turn of the century, the scope of which extended beyond Woolf's well-documented familiarity with evolutionary science to include the emergent disciplines of biology, ethology, and early ecology.

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9. Just as the life sciences in the early twentieth century tended to define their methods and practices against the taxonomic tradition of natural history, Alt argues, "Woolf's childhood encounter with natural history led her early in life to form a critical view of the taxonomic tradition and its component practices of collection and classification. Thereafter, she repeatedly employed the collecting habit and the classificatory mentality as analogies through which to comment on social and literary conventions that she regarded as similarly restrictive and reductive" (72).

10. Hilary Thompson provides an illuminating reading of Septimus's messianic martyrdom in terms of Agamben's elaboration of sovereignty and the state of exception (90–94). Septimus and Bradshaw accordingly expose the limits of the legal order as Septimus embodies an exceptional figure privy to universal truths that suggest his extra-legal status and Bradshaw assumes the role of the sovereign whose prerogative is to declare the states of exception in which the law might be suspended.

11. Donald Childs (38–57) has persuasively shown how the eugenical values that motivate Bradshaw's policing of bad blood carry over into Lady Bruton's emigration scheme, the character of the Christian Doris Kilman (modeled upon Jean Thomas, the proprietor of the Sussex sanatorium where Woolf received treatment), Clarissa's ruminations on her daughter's Mongolian features, and even the narrator's description of Septimus's loose-lipped profile. Such moments in the novel do not go wholly unchallenged, however, and I am less inclined to view them as evidence of "Woolf's personal eugenical anxiety" (51).

12. Freud's case history of the Wolf Man, entitled "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis" (1918), appeared in the third volume of the *Collected Papers*, also published by the Hogarth Press in 1925, the same year as *Mrs. Dalloway*. See pp. 498–519 for Freud's account of the Wolf Man's dream (*Standard Edition* XVII: 29–47). The genealogical significance of the tree is not lost upon Freud, who reads the wolves as surrogates for the patient's father and mother and Latin tutor, appropriately named Wolf.

13. See Sheehan (132–34) and Gordon (142–43). In what is arguably Woolf's first feminist polemic, her early essay on the Plumage Bill recognizes the significance of birds to the ethical debate over animal welfare and the extent of human obligations toward the nonhuman world. Though not an essay about birds and wildlife advocacy per se, "The Plumage Bill" (1920) suggests the coimplication of cultural attitudes toward animals and women as ontologically other. For a fuller discussion of Woolf's essay and her ambivalent relation to the animal protectionist cause, see Abbott and Alt (132–35).

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14. In Woolf's *Flush,* Elizabeth Barrett Browning, with her cocker spaniel Flush at her feet, looks up from her writing to think about a form of sensibility that lies beyond human language and its imperfect communications: "'Writing', Miss Barrett once exclaimed after a morning's toil, 'writing, writing . . .' After all, she may have thought, do words say everything? Can words say anything? Do not words destroy the symbol that lies beyond the reach of words?" (27).

15. For a fuller treatment of zoo animals, both real and metaphoric, in Woolf's writing, see Espley. If her depictions of zoological encounters in works like *Night and Day* have not quite managed to have "wholly divorced the animal from animality" Espley argues, Woolf's awareness of the "fallacy of animality" prevents her from imposing its proscriptive discourse back onto the real animals she so frequently visited at the London Zoological Gardens (90-91).

16. The arboreal images that recur to Septimus throughout the novel are reminiscent of Darwin's repeated deployment of tree imagery for humans' and animals' common origins (see Beer 15-16 and Sheehan 133). Septimus's metaphoric borrowing from Darwin, whose work formed part of his prewar reading, signals a refusal to suppress the insights of evolutionary science and man's place alongside his animal cousins.

17. Examining the "fictional evolution" of Septimus's character from an earlier draft version of the novel's first section, "The Prime Minister," to the completed novel, Suzette Henke notes that Woolf introduced several important changes: deleting references to Septimus's intention to assassinate the Prime Minister, removing his cannibalistic wish to offer his body eucharistically to the city's hungry, and extending the expression of his hallucinations in such a way as to render them more sympathetic. Such emendations, Henke argues, have the effect of making his character more "humanized" and "more successfully integrated into the larger panoply of postwar society" (151).

18. Woolf's fictional biographer pretends to equivocate on the question of canine suicide: "Whether he wished to kill himself, or whether, as Mrs Carlyle insinuates, he was merely jumping after birds, might be the occasion for an extremely interesting treatise on canine psychology. . . .For the present, Nero's motives must remain obscure" (114).

19. I am grateful to Jane Goldman for drawing my attention to this canine connection.

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Gothic Interiority and Servants in Wharton's *A Backward Glance* and "The Lady's Maid's Bell"

Ann Mattis

In the "Autobiographical Postscript" to a collection of her ghost stories, Edith Wharton recounts an inscrutable terror that plagued her for seven years as a child, when she was recovering from an almost fatal case of typhoid, an illness she describes as marking "the dividing line between my little childhood and the next stage" (301).[1]

Associating the uncanny with the conflated experiences of female adolescence and life-threatening disease, Wharton recalls the literary tradition of the Female Gothic, a genre defined first by Ellen Moers, who argues in *Literary Women* (1976) that female authors deploy gothic tropes as a covert means of critiquing patriarchal domesticity. On her sickbed, Wharton is drawn to ghost stories, initially with delight, but then becoming so afraid that she is unable to sleep alone due to "formless terrors":

> It was like some dark undefinable menace, forever dogging my steps, lurking, and threatening; I was conscious of it wherever I went by day, and at night it made sleep impossible, unless a light and a nurse-maid were in the room. But, whatever it was, it was most formidable and pressing when I was returning from my daily walk (which I always took with a maid or governess, or with my father). (302)

The "undefinable" nature of Wharton's terror reminds us of Freud's definition of the uncanny, invading and defamiliarizing the familiar space, relations, and routines of the home. After associating the uncanny with fears of death, castration, and ego-disturbing doubles, Freud ultimately relates the ambivalence of the uncanny to female genitalia, or the womb—the earliest "home," repudiated and rendered foreign in the achievement of

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a self-sustaining ego ("The Uncanny"). As a potent source of subversive meaning, the incompletely repressed maternal has often been privileged in psychoanalytic feminist readings of gothic texts. However, while the Female Gothic often associates notions of the uncanny with the maternal, in Wharton's anecdote her mother, as a comfort or an object of desire, fear, or loathing, is replaced by servants. Her most primal psychic dramas, that is, were determined not by fixed positions of "Mother," "Father," and "Daughter," but by contingent practices of domestic labor and sociality.

As would have been the case for most wealthy children in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Wharton's material and affective needs as primary caregivers were met by governesses and nursemaids. Wharton writes in *A Backward Glance*: "The child of the well-to-do, hedged in by nurses and governesses, seldom knows much of its parents' activities" (57). Attending to the historical reality of American domestic service in the industrial era prompts us to reconsider how we interpret servants as both players in social history and characters in literature. Far from remaining merely ancillary to the primordial family drama, literary servants fracture myths of a hermetically-sealed nuclear family, becoming implicated in the primal web of desire, fear, and identification in the Female Gothic. In this essay, I historicize Wharton's autobiography, *A Backward Glance,* and her ghost story "The Lady's Maid's Bell" in terms of Progressive-era reforms in order to articulate how servants supplement representations of modern female interiority and relationality. Rather than privileging a psychoanalytic framework, I explore how psychosocial configurations in Wharton's texts both invoke and contain the feminized labor conflicts of domestic service. Through my readings, I underscore how servants prompt us to recuperate the political from material that is ostensibly only psychological, reduced in Fredric Jameson's term, to an "individual-fantasy experience" (22). In short, this essay reads Wharton's texts in order to demonstrate how a specifically feminized psychic landscape uneasily relies on the repression of abject wage labor.

My materialist feminist approach to Wharton's work builds upon Marxist literary scholarship theorizing how servants haunt the psychoanalytic scripts that often underlie critical interpretations of the Gothic. Reading Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw,* Bruce Robbins illustrates how gothic servants are politically indeterminate figures who expose how the bourgeois household's "sexual economy is interwoven into the reproductive economy" (199). While servants functioned as key players

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in bourgeois and elite children's psychological development and sexual education, Robbins articulates how the erasure of servants in Freudian master narratives signals a larger tendency to evacuate the sociopolitical from the domestic sphere. By considering how the nursemaid becomes elided in Freud's original Oedipal theory, Robbins politicizes the psychosexual conflicts of the bourgeois subject. Likewise, in his reading of another one of James's stories, Brian McKuskey explores how Freud's early discussions of the uncanny explicitly associate it with both the return of the repressed and servants' bedtime story-telling, while in later versions Freud erases the servant's significance, analyzing the bed-time story in allegorical rather than case study terms (427). McKuskey reasserts the social subtext at the center of the Gothic to suggest how servants shaped bourgeois subjectivity in childhood (424). But while such interpretations of servants have very importantly recuperated class in psychoanalytic narratives, they approach the servant as a gender-neutral category and have not situated these representations of modern subjectivity as an effect of labor relations that are primarily negotiated by women.[2] We need, then, to recover the materialist implications of servants in gothic texts as they pertain to gender and race as well as to class.[3]

Although feminist criticism has recently challenged early definitions of the Female Gothic that assume an ahistorical or unified notion of womanhood, it has not considered the sociopolitical subtext of gothic servitude.[4] Analyzing Wharton's gothic fiction, Holly Blackford draws from Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *Madwoman in the Attic,* to prove that servants act as darker doubles symbolizing subversive desires or as "warning signs," undermining gothic mistresses' equation of their sexual desires with patriarchal domestic ideologies ("Haunted," 234-35):[5] "In the Gothic form, in which characters always encounter their doubles such that individual identity is undermined, the mistress and servant become natural doubles, engaged in perverse, erotic, and competitive relationships" (236).[6] Also engaging eroticized service relations, though in gothic films rather than literature, Patricia White complicates the way we interpret oedipal processes of female identification and desire by accentuating "lesbian overtones [that] unleash an excess of female sexuality that cannot be contained without recourse to the supernatural, or indeed the unnatural" (61).[7] Gothic service relations have thus often been interpreted as subversive because they evoke pre-oedipal bonds, signal the failure of phallocentric oedipal identification, or are encoded by way of

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female homoeroticism and non-kin homosociality. While such readings certainly reveal how gothic relationships pose challenges to the categories of gender and sexuality that enable patriarchal domesticity, at the same time the propensity to interpret service relations as subversive de-centers questions of class, observing how seemingly radical critiques of patriarchal domesticity can remain seeped in the bourgeois imaginary and reinforce class hegemony.

Emphasizing the material reality underlying domestic service representations, I illuminate how the Female Gothic's figurative patterns of surrogacy and non-normative sociality are tethered to the domestic wage relation. Drawing from Judith Halberstam's study of the Gothic, I suggest the Gothic's propensity to psychologize and sexualize all conflicts is ultimately an ideological effect of capitalism.[8] Thus, I read the erotic and identificatory excess of the maid/mistress relationship not as subversive, but as an effect of the domestic wage relation and its attendant social history.

Within Wharton's gothic texts, the sociopolitical conflicts of modern domestic service are recast as interior conflicts. Yet this psychologization of social conflicts itself has a history. While discussing representations of interiority in relation to antebellum reforms and literature, Christopher Castiglia identifies what he calls "interior states" that operate as a "microversion of the social, not simply as an individuals 'private' realm of desires, affects, and appetites, but as a realm of disruption and attempted order" (3). In my readings, I recover such social tensions by historicizing the psychic byproducts of Wharton's gothic imaginary, within which servants and the served are often conflated or become co-players in the same symbolic enterprise.[9] At once invoking and obfuscating the actual labor struggles of domestic service in the Progressive era, gothic servitude often exceeds its figurative containers and privatized configurations, beckoning us not to look deeper into the unconscious, but to more closely examine the genre's surface.

Autobiographical rumblings, reforms, and the Female Gothic self

In this section I revisit pertinent moments in Wharton's autobiography *A Backward Glance* in order to reveal how the dialectical nature of actual service relations gets mapped onto representations of female interiority. Rather than treating Wharton's autobiography as authoritative source ma-

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terial for understanding her fictive rendition of gothic interiority, I read *A Backward Glance* as evoking a poignant sociopolitical transition in the American service industry that has weighty implications for the Female Gothic. While it engages in the same kind of figurative slippages that dematerialize interiority in gothic texts, *A Backward Glance* draws from real life scenarios, responding perhaps more obviously to a historically-specific set of labor relations that appear psychologized in gothic fiction.

The prominent role of domestic servants in Wharton's autobiographical writing and gothic fiction not only reminds us of servants' functions in the Gilded Age as the "conspicuous" signifiers of wealth Thorstein Veblen articulated in *The Theory of the Leisure Class,* but it also reflects how the fraught social relations of modern domestic service haunt representations of bourgeois interiority and affect. In *A Backward Glance,* Wharton recounts memories of Howard Sturgis, a man whose father was a Bostonian, but whose mother was English. Born and raised in England, Howard typified the "Old American" wealth, his family uniting old English money with the American merchant and banking class. In distinguishing Old Americans from the conspicuous leisure class, Wharton invokes Sturgis's servants as a primary signifier of his elite brand of wealth. Although "Old America" is premised upon a harmonious union of European and American values and "stock," it is his archaic servants—not Sturgis himself—who signal his class status. Wharton's characterization of him relies heavily on such anecdotes of servants' insistent loyalty: "I have sometimes thought that Howard's old servants represented not inaptly the odd duality of his nature: Robinson his long-suffering sweetness and unselfishness, and the devoted but dour Christina the streak of asperity which sometimes came to the surface" (229). In collapsing servants' and masters' personae in such a way, Wharton's autobiography replicates the gothic convention associated most strongly with servants in fiction: their role as the protagonists' döppelganger or surrogate. Because the "streak of asperity" becomes attributed to Sturgis, we are prompted to read his attendants as a mere projection of bourgeois or elite interiority. Yet, the way remnants of these autobiographical anecdotes creep into Wharton's literary engagement with the uncanny suggest that that "streak of asperity" is more than just a projection of bourgeois and elite characters' transgressive inclinations.

In the intersections between Wharton's autobiographical references to household help and her literary depiction of servants, one discovers a

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clear preoccupation with the ways industrial capitalism had changed the social contours of domestic service—and how those changes affected both women and the world of Old Americans, which clung tenuously to feudal customs born on a different continent. In the Progressive era, reformers urged mistresses to manage their homes—and families—in a more professional manner. They specifically disparaged the feudal nature of domestic service. In a YWCA commission bulletin in 1916, Ida Tarbell wrote that "American housewives live in the eighteenth century, and not in the eighteenth century of revolutionary France and revolutionary America, but the feudal eighteenth century" (qtd. in Strasser 172). Adapting industrial and scientific principles to the domestic sphere, home economics reformers called on mistresses to regulate the haphazard labor relations of the service industry for ethical, sanitary, and above all social reasons.[10] At the forefront of domestic service reforms in the Progressive Era, historian Lucy Maynard Salmon deployed the scientific method to address the problem of maid/mistress relations, which she exposes in her influential study *Domestic Service* (1897) to be overly personal and in desperate need of standardization.[11] The allusions to live-in domestic service as eroding the democratic nucleus of home-life reveal that professionalizing the industry was also meant to contain the heterogeneous modes of sociality prompted by modernity, progressivism, migrations, urbanization, and labor reforms themselves. This reflects an intense rhetorical urgency to privatize domestic intimacy—to bracket the core intimacies of bourgeois home-life from the progressive social institutions they aspired to cultivate for the nation's well-being.[12]

As much as everyone pathologized maid/mistress intimacy—and perhaps even more fervently, intimacy or sexual relations between servants and bourgeois husbands—female-authored fiction registers a refusal to purge those relationships from the cultural imagination. Wharton's texts specifically reflect a profound ambivalence toward professional domestic service reforms, as well as the accompanying social anxieties that were newly associated with American servants. Progressive shifts in attitudes toward domestic service posed challenges to the social order that signaled the authentic class and racial superiority of Old Americans, whose power, according to eugenic discourses, was thought to have been diluted by the foreign masses.[13] As a member of the Old American tribe, Wharton thus had a complicated relationship to Progressive-era domestic reforms. On the one hand, she wrote a decorating manual *The Decoration of Houses*,

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that might seem to partake in the home economics reform movement. As Renée Somers argues, the manual poses some challenges to class and gender hierarchies and critiques the ignorance and excess of her wealthy readers, by "plac[ing] taste and class into a dialogue with one another" (99-100). On the other hand, she does not—by any means—place women workers' material needs at the center of her discussion of domesticity. Given the elaborate and explicit reform agenda of the home economics movement, I am wary of associating Wharton's notion of domesticity with reform, especially since she disdained the benevolent tenor of the reform movement (Wegener 150-51).

At a time when progressive reformers (like Salmon and Charlotte Perkins Gilman) were rigorously addressing the topic of servants' dress, wages, hours, and housing, Wharton only briefly asserts in her decorating manual that houses should be designed with the servants' well-being in mind. Asserting that "vestibules should have an outer opening toward the street and an inner one giving into the hall" so that the house remains warm, and servants do not have to remain outside when there is entertainment in the house (105), Wharton accounts for servants' comfort, even as she maintains an interest in preserving a distinctly European method of demarcating entryways between the family and service staff when American progressives were trying to democratize domestic spaces by eradicating live-in service altogether. In the way she describes an ideal domestic space, Wharton underscores utility but also privacy, which she regards as the most important facet of "civilized life" (22). As Vanessa Chase argues, Wharton's limited perspective of the domestic sphere in the manual attests to her class privilege, especially since she neglects to discuss the service-related rooms of the house (146). Despite Wharton's vigilance in maintaining barriers between the servants and the served in the manual, her writing also reveals a steadfast interest in the social proximity of employers to their servants within the home. Unlike Veblen and Gilman, who lament that servants' subordination signifies the leisure-class household's degeneracy, Wharton often seems to be morbidly fascinated with servants' full-fledged subservience to Old American families.[14]

Material reformers' re-organization of domestic service sheds light on the figurative re-organization of the Female Gothic self, a primary mode through which bourgeois subjectivity has taken literary form. Because houses and döppelgangers have been regarded as extensions of a generalized notion of the female psyche, servants often do the labor of

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sustaining monolithic conceptions of the feminine. The Female Gothic thus frequently invites us to read all its surfaces and minor characters in the same way Wharton reads Howard Sturgis's servants: as projections of conflicted interiority. Such readings often leave us with a vague sense of Woman's psychic response to patriarchy. This is because the maid/mistress relationship becomes interwoven with the spatial conventions of the gothic self, which as Eve Sedgwick has discussed, manifest in "immutable" ways. Specifically, "doubleness" arises because the gothic self is "blocked off from something it ought normally have access to" (12). For Sedgwick, the inside/outside spatial relationship between unreachable object (e.g. the past, love, information) and this self is constant:

> The self and whatever it is that is outside have a proper, natural, necessary connection with one another, but one that the self is suddenly incapable of making. The inside and the outside life have to continue separately, becoming counterparts rather than partners, the relationship between them is one of parallels and correspondences rather than communication. This, though it may happen in an instant, is a fundamental reorganization, creating a doubleness where singleness should be. (13)

Because the whole notion of a servant being a surrogate for, or even a companion to, a mistress was under great scrutiny at the turn of the century, it should give us pause that the doubleness confounding the self in the Female Gothic revolved around service relations. Exposing for the first time servants' exploitation as well as mistresses' frustrations with the inefficiencies of service, progressive reformers created a rift—or doubleness—within the maid/mistress relationship, which had been a site of imagined singularity. Nonetheless, reformers sought to depict mistresses' and maids' interests and concerns as complementary even though the agenda was defined largely by bourgeois interests and within the paradigm of benevolent capitalism. The tumultuous doubleness that characterizes service relations in the modern Female Gothic reveals how the domestic wage relation ruptures this bourgeois fantasy but also how that doubleness gets re-negotiated. Embedded in the narrative logic of Wharton's writing about elite American households (including her own) is an uncanny desire to maintain the residual intimacy of *feudal* service relations, which were, of course, largely a figment of her imagination. In these representations, the social and temporal implications of domestic service determine the drama of female sexuality and psychosocial development.

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How dialectical service relations get mapped onto female interiority can be understood by returning to Wharton's autobiography. There, Wharton repeatedly invokes the division of domestic labor in the elite household largely in *affective* terms that pychologize the female servant's function in the girl child's imagination. At the beginning of *A Backward Glance*, she describes her earliest memories pertaining to domestic intimacy:

> Peopling the background of these earliest scenes there were the tall splendid father who was always so kind, and whose strong arms lifted one so high, and held one so safely; and my mother, who wore such beautiful flounced dresses, and had painted and carved fans in sandalwood boxes, and ermine scarves, and perfumed yellowish laces pinned up in blue paper, and kept in a marquetry chiffonier, and all the other dim impersonal attributes of a Mother, without, as yet, anything much more definite; and two big brothers who were mostly away (the eldest already at college); but in the foreground with Foxy [the pet] there was one rich all-permeating presence: Doyley. How I pity all children who have not had a Doyley—a nurse who has always been there, who is as established as the sky and as warm as the sun, who understands everything, feels everything, can arrange everything, and combines all the powers of the Divinity with the compassion of a mortal heart like one's own! Doyley's presence was the warm cocoon in which my infancy lived safe and sheltered; the atmosphere without which I could not have breathed. It is thanks to Doyley that not one bitter memory, one uncomprehended injustice, darkened the days when the soul's flesh is so tender, and the remembrance of wrongs so acute. (26)

What is striking about this sentimental description is not only that Wharton ascribes her entire early childhood development to her nursemaid, but that she describes her mother and Doyley in terms that are wholly divergent. Wharton's mother is associated with "impersonal" and decorative physicality, specifically, a string of sensuous metonyms connoting leisure-class femininity: "beautiful flounced dresses," "painted and carved fans," and "ermine scarves," "perfumed yellowish laces." Doyley is invoked not only as a one-dimensional loyal servant but as an "all-permeating presence"; comparisons to nature abstract and reduce her to a hazy specter of the child's imagination. Despite performing all the physical duties of

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the maternal function and, implicitly, being the primary source of same-sex attachment, Doyley has no independent physicality.[15]

In terms of Sedgwick's theory of doubleness and the gothic self, this portrait of nursemaid and girl child reads as a prehistory of singleness, a scene of preoedipal female homosociality, that is to be contrasted with the commodifed and fragmented femininity Wharton associates with her mother. But by de-corporealizing Doyley at this primal scene of maternal identification and desire, where the lines of self/other, and child/maid, are blurred, Wharton also represses the materiality of Doyley's labor; indeed, the servant's idealized affective capacity supplants the domestic wage relation in its complete dissolution in the girl child's psyche. While the servant/child relation is presented as an ideal, this relation can exist as such only within a nostalgic space of interiority, which is significant given that modern reformers, like Salmon, denounced the sentimental doctrine of servants as family members. In Wharton's description of Doyley, this ideal relationality has feudal connotations and the professional bond—and wage relation—dictated by modern domestic service is repressed. Wharton's representations of gothic interiority and sociality, however, reveal a rift between this mystified feudal scenario and the modern domestic wage relation, reflecting her anxiety and ambivalence about a changing industry.

Even if we were to accept the the Freudian premise that maturity rests upon girls' converting their same-sex attachment into an identification with normative femininity, the social history of domestic service, especially within an elite household such as Wharton's, certainly creates fault lines in that oedipal plot. In her discussion of servants' impact on civic desire and identity in a colonial European context, Ann Stoler has articulated how children's social and sexual behaviors were described in terms of "racialized class difference" (151). "The social grammar of prescriptions for making a child into a bourgeois adult," Stoler writes, "rested on distinctions that affirmed the virtues of whiteness and the moral high ground of bourgeois civilities at the same time.[16] I argue that the servant's function as an oppositional presence and cultural trope is also significant for girls and young women in early-twentieth-century urban America but operates in quite a different social register than the one Stoler proposes. In the modern literary context of the American Female Gothic, the "social grammar" of class and race is paradoxically invoked by the genre's trenchant critique of patriarchal domesticity that often hinges upon female servants' non-normative role within female-centered oedipal narratives.

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The over-determined affective function of gothic servants in modern women's processes of self-definition—as well as their role in the overall sexual education of bourgeois households—is thus evident in the psychic structure underlying Wharton's own autobiography but also the narrative logic of gothic interiority and sociality.

Ringing the feudal bell: maid/mistress relationality in "The Lady's Maid's Bell"

Unlike *A Backward Glance,* which features impressions of the elite American household that are filtered entirely through Wharton's perspective, the narrator of "The Lady's Maid's Bell" is Hartley, a domestic employee who goes to work for new employers—the Brympton family—in the New York countryside. While servant narrators are not an uncommon plot device in domestic fiction—especially the Gothic—Wharton's choice to focalize Hartley's perspective in part mimics the discursive trends in Progressive-era domestic reforms. At the time "The Lady's Maid's Bell" was published, periodicals were showcasing articles about domestic service from the servant's point of view, as well as stories about journalists who went undercover as domestics to expose the exploitative conditions of service. Evoking a newfound frankness and panic about the social relations of domestic service, such articles often exposed servants in middle-class and elite homes as sexually vulnerable.

Before she becomes entangled in the irrational workings of the uncanny, Hartley addresses domestic service in a manner resembling contemporary exposés. Self-possessed and committed to her own interests and well-being, she is decidedly a modern domestic who vocalizes the grievances of service work. Wondering why the previous lady's maid left the Brympton household, Hartley asks another servant whether she was "young and handsome" and had thus left on account of the master's lasciviousness, but a gossipy servant replies, "Not her! She's the kind that mothers engage when they've gay young gentlemen at college" (21). By revealing such factors as servants' youth and beauty as playing a role in mistresses' hiring practices, Wharton lays bare the sexual exploitations of modern domestic service in a way that troubles romantic conventions. In fact, in her description of her master, Mr. Brympton, Hartley overtly demystifies the Byronic hero who often captivates the hearts of gentrified servant girls in other gothic tales:

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> He was standing on the hearth; a big fair bull-necked man, with a red face and little bad-tempered eyes: the kind of man a young simpleton would have thought handsome, and would have been like to pay dear for thinking it. He swung about when I came in, and looked me over in a trice. I knew what the look meant, from having experienced it once or twice in my former places. Then he turned his back on me, and went on talking to his wife; and I knew what *that* meant too. I was not the kind of morsel he was after. The typhoid had served me well enough in one way: it kept that kind of gentleman at arm's length. (18)

This scenario reflects modern shifts in domestic service rhetoric insofar as reformers had only recently begun to interrogate the hidden sexual economy of domestic service in ways that highlighted male predation instead of domestic workers' romantic or oversexed proclivities. Constructing a metanarrative through which to read the visual power dynamics of service relations, Hartley not only deflects the male gaze but materializes her own subjectivity as an objectified servant. As a feminine spectacle both diseased and self-aware, Hartley carves out a space of resistance for herself within the elite household.

Because Hartley addresses rather explicitly the modern trials of domestic service, Wharton's story is, ostensibly, quite progressive. A labyrinth of gothic intimacies, however, ultimately guides the remainder of the ghost story's plot. Hartley is drawn uncannily into the Brymptons' mysterious domestic service history. She is haunted by Emma Saxon, Lady Brympton's beloved maid who recently died. While these ghostly sightings frighten her, they also draw her closer to her mistress for whom she feels an inexplicable devotion. In addition to this love triangle involving Hartley, Emma, and Lady Brympton, Hartley begins to suspect that Lady Brympton is unfaithful to her rakish alcoholic husband, spending her afternoons with the gentle and refined neighbor Mr. Ranford. Although the parameters of the heterosexual love triangle are ambiguous, it seems that Emma appears in order to tell Hartley something of the relationship between Mr. Ranford and Lady Brympton, as, towards the end of the story, she leads Hartley all the way to Mr. Ranford's estate. The ambiguity of Mr. Ranford and Lady Brympton's relationship is mimicked in the description of the bond between Lady Brympton and Emma, as suggestively erotic as it is archaic. At the end, Lady Brympton dies with Hartley and Mr. Brympton at her side, after receiving one last visit from

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the apparition Emma Saxon, whose visits are signaled repeatedly by the sound of the servant's bell in Hartley's room (a bell that Lady Brympton claims not to have rung).

In "The Lady's Maid's Bell," a dizzying array of social distinctions and labor relations produces multiple lines of intimacy and allegiance that intersect with the story's gothic love triangles. Hartley is chosen specifically to wait on the kind Mrs. Brympton because she is "educated above her station" (13). Unlike the housemaid Agnes, who is responsible for menial tasks, Hartley is granted close proximity to the mistress, appointed to be a kind of companion to her. Nonetheless, along with Mrs. Blinder, the cook, and Agnes, Hartley is required to dine in the servants' hall, in contrast to the higher-ranked housekeeper, butlers, trained nurses, and governesses, whose elevated social status within the servant class further accentuates the household's wealth.[17]

Occupying a liminal position within the social hierarchy of the elite household, Hartley's focalizing perspective reveals how gothic servitude becomes encoded and naturalized in representations of female homosociality. Certainly, the liminality of gentrified servants has played a key role in the erotic configurations at the center of gothic plots before, if we consider the governess' crushes on their masters in *The Turn of the Screw* or *Jane Eyre*. Wharton likewise evokes the complex nature of intimacy characterizing elite domestic arrangements, to suggest how social hierarchies are alternately secured and unhinged. Wharton, however, foregrounds the maid/mistress relationship within the gothic plot's complicated web of identification and desire. While there are many significant parallels with *The Turn of the Screw*—a text that famously evokes the intersection between servants and the uncanny—Wharton's gothic narrative explicitly engages the material context of modern domestic service and provides a fantasy context for how they affected both female employers and servants. In centering her story on a narrative of female-centered labor relations, Wharton reveals how a modern landscape of servitude involves representations of gothic interiority and trans-class female homosociality.

In addition to exposing the elite household as a dangerous space for domestic workers, Hartley represents domestic service as a professionalizing industry. Unlike James's governess in *The Turn of the Screw*, who goes to her employer's cozy parlor after answering a letter, Hartley spent months "hanging about employing agencies" and was rejected by various mistresses who thought her too "weak and tottery" (12). And while James

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sets his ghost story in the British Victorian past, Hartley's reference to the employment agency brings gothic servants immediately into a modern American context, focusing on agencies that were meant to regulate the employment of servants, a practice that had been, historically, very personalized. In the Progressive era, modern domestic service reformers had already begun to criticize how these employment agencies had backfired, especially in terms of how they de-humanized servants and reduced them to physical specimens. Wharton materializes the servant's subjectivity in her experience of being objectified, significantly attributing these visual dynamics to the de-personalized gaze of mistresses within the cold institutional context of modern employment agencies.

Although Wharton's focalizing Hartley's subjectivity may be seen as paralleling the progressive agenda's attending to the laborer's point of view, we are then immediately presented with an idealized arrangement of maid/mistress relationality based not on professionalism but romantic friendship. Lady Brympton's aunt, whom Hartley significantly meets by chance on the street—not in the employment agency—urges her to take up house with her niece:

> My niece is an angel. Her former maid, who died last spring, had been with her twenty years and worshipped the ground she walked on. She's a kind mistress to all, and where the mistress is kind, as you know, the mistresses are generally good-humored. And you are the very woman I want for my niece: quiet, well-mannered, and educated above your station. You read aloud well, I think? That's a good thing; my niece likes to be read to. She wants a maid that can be something of a companion: her last was, and I can't say how she misses her. (13)

Given that contemporary reformers were rigorously promoting what Barbara Ryan has called a "post-sentimentalist" (165) agenda for domestic service, the homosocial intimacy presented here would have most likely appeared outdated to a modern reader. The above description makes it evident that the ghost of Emma Saxon—and her relationship with her mistress—is a hyperbolic idealization of a feudal service industry that Wharton identified with Old New York. The affective residue of feudal service relations (embodied in the life-long service of Emma Saxon) leaves Hartley—and presumably her predecessors—smitten with Lady Brympton. While this benevolent relationship of reciprocal kindness is contrasted to the cold professionalism introduced to us in the beginning

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of the story, we also learn that since Emma died, there have been a string of servant girls—four in six months—who left the household abruptly. So, even if the pre-industrial ideal of maid/mistress intimacy is at the gothic core of this text, it is contextualized in relation to modern conflicts of the service industry—not just the sexual exploitation of servants but also their high turnover rate.

It is thus strange that Hartley's and Lady Brympton's bond parallels Emma and her mistress's twenty-year-old relationship. Even Hartley comments on the oddity of their first interaction:

> She was a delicate-looking lady, but when she smiled I felt there was nothing I wouldn't do for her. She spoke very pleasantly, and in a low voice, asking me my name and age and so on, and if I had everything I wanted, and if I wasn't afraid of feeling lonely in the country.
>
> "Not with you I wouldn't be, madam," I said, and the words surprised me when I'd spoken them, for I'm not an impulsive person; but it was just as if I'd thought aloud. (15)

Hartley's self-possession and modern sensibilities dissolve in the face of her delicate mistress. Because her impulses manifest as unfiltered, servile devotion, the story suggests that the uncanny connection Hartley feels toward her mistress is rooted in unconscious feelings that are both pre-oedipal and pre-industrial. Abiding by the classic Girardian scheme, Hartley's desire for her mistress is imitative: her love mimics that of her ghostly predecessor, Emma, whose intimate companionship with her mistress was a domestic service model strongly eschewed by modern reformers. In "The Lady's Maid's Bell," the maid/mistress relationship thus becomes a site upon which the psychosocial landscape is collapsed into the social relations of production. While the pre-oedipal/pre-industrial seems to be in the place of the "return of the repressed," these psychic manifestations both displace and signal the hard realities and social relations of modern domestic service.[18]

In analyzing the relationship between Hartley and Lady Brympton, feminist critics have noted the psychosexual significance of the bell in Wharton's story. As Blackford points out, the bell is what unites Emma and Hartley yet estranges Hartley from her mistress (236-37). Hartley wants her mistress to summon her with the bell but is told that another servant (Agnes) will get her when she is needed, which is why she is

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so confused and disturbed when her bell rings: "suddenly a loud noise wakened me. My bell had rung. I sat up, terrified by the unusual sound, which seemed to go on jangling through the darkness. . . .I began to think I must have been dreaming; but I looked at the bell against the wall, and there was the little hammer still quivering" (24). After hearing her bell ring, Hartley gets up to answer it and sees the apparition of Emma running down the hall toward Lady Brympton's room. Upon her arrival, Mr. Brympton answers the door and says, "*How many of you are there, in God's name?*" She then goes into Lady Brympton's, who with eyes closed cries out, "*Emma,*" and after waking, tells Hartley to leave her, turning her face away. Mr. Brympton's comment draws attention to the proliferation of doubles in the story, but also how female servants subvert the male-centered triangulations of homosocial desire that typically govern gothic plots. "The Lady's Maid's Bell" invokes the classic formula of the romantic hero (Mr. Ramsford) versus the Byronic hero (Mr. Brympton) fighting for possession of the distressed mistress, but inserts overlapping triangulations that emphasize the multidirectional intimacy within the elite household. While Mr. Ramsford's and Lady Brympton's interaction poses a progressive challenge to the traditional obligations of elite marriage, these competing portraits of intimacy are mediated by the feudal specter of maid/mistress relationality.

Kathy Fedorko has argued that the bell is a feminized communicative device, "the little hammer quivering" a clitoral image connecting all three women—mistress, Emma Saxon, and Hartley—in a "drama of female sexuality" (28). Though enshrouded in romanticized rituals of female homosociality, the material exploitation of domestics shines through the sentimental staging of women's trans-class solidarity. Reading the bell as pertaining to the "dark knowledge of the maternal-erotic" (29), Fedorko assumes a universalized drama of female sexuality and subversive female bonding. Freud explicitly associated the female anatomy with the uncanny in his 1919 essay.[19] While the generalized fear of female anatomy remains in Freud's later account of "The Uncanny," this fear—coupled with the significant role of the nursemaid in earlier accounts—reminds us how femininity is inevitably class-coded, revealing asymmetries within the feminine that we need to recuperate when analyzing psychic narratives. Filtering the homoerotic allure of feudal relationality through the perspective of a modern servant, "The Lady's Maid's Bell" presents us with an archaic fantasy of service relations that endure because they are

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premised not just upon principles of mutual devotion, but also a female servant's fervent servitude to her mistress. By presenting Hartley as having a deep-seated yearning to adore her mistress, Wharton's gothic narrative thus exposes a notion of the "repressed" that is not linked to women's subversion of patriarchal domesticity; rather, the repressed is rooted in a fantasy of a lower-class woman's wholehearted subordination to her female employer. The highly personalized nature of Lady Brympton's and Hartley's relationship poses a challenge to the traditional institution of marriage. Yet it also draws attention to the fact that the narrative—and the feudal effects of service relations—literally erodes the personhood of servants so that servants' and maids' desires and needs are conflated.

What critics have not noted is that the bell also correlates with material dynamics of feudal service relations; the literal connotations of the bell thus complicate a "universalized" and ahistorical drama of female sexuality. Significantly it is the bell that establishes a singular line of communication, and thus unites the domestic counterparts of mistress and maid. While Hartley is an English immigrant, her eagerness to use the bell, as well as the story's presentation of it as a common practice, ruptures the story's verisimilitude. Even to an elite reader, the bell would have seemed outdated and decidedly un-American. In *A Backward Glance* Wharton refers to servants' bells in her discussion of the Sturgis family, one of the "Old American" families that I refer to in my first section. Disappointed by the lack of pomp and circumstance at the Sturgis's American estate, the English butler, Hall, quickly left his post when he learned that a servant's bell would not be used. Howard Sturgis, the relatively modern-minded American heir to the Sturgis fortune, is similarly made uncomfortable by Hall's formality, but considers the use of bells to be charming, if laughable: an outdated practice identified with feudal customs. Howard's English servant's archaic zeal for such customs nonetheless establishes his clear-cut European origins and elite status. Similarly, Hartley, in identifying with the former lady's maid, Emma, who had been the Lady Brympton's lifelong attendant, reiterates status by maintaining a genealogy of servile devotion.

The fantasy of female solidarity, which is also preserved in many feminist critics' readings of the maid/mistress's subversive connection, upholds a unified notion of the feminine. Additionally, it reveals how the inadequate repression of the domestic wage relation plays an important role in the Female Gothic's critique of traditional kinship. Gothic servants remind us that marriages were not the only social relation contradicting

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the egalitarian myths underlying both labor and kinship under capitalism. While the incorporation of service relations into the modern female psyche in part masks the wage relation, "The Lady's Maid's Bell" also lays bare the complex social anxieties at the center of that seemingly privatized terrain.

As well as being a psychosexual symbol, the bell is a decidedly homosocial symbol of upper servants' eroticized servility and state of being possessed by their same-sex employers. Because masters and mistresses slept in separate quarters, their same-sex attendants took part in a whole range of intimate practices that the narrative invokes. Facilitating the unmitigated access of maids to their mistresses—or of valets and butlers to their masters—bells sustain same-sex labor relations within feudal service contexts, and within the story they show how domestic service contributes to the overall social dynamics of kinship within the elite household. Wharton's story (like contemporary reformers' texts) reflects how female servants and mistresses are both victims of patriarchal kinship. The bell scene—and the scene that precedes it—specifically unites not just Hartley with Emma and Lady Brympton, but also Hartley with Mr. and Lady Brympton, all who have the capacity to see the apparition. Just prior to hearing the bell ring in her room, Hartley describes leaving her mistress's room "rather later than usual," and meeting Mr. Brympton "coming up the stairs in such a state that I turned sick to think of what some ladies have to endure and hold their tongues about" (19). Together, these scenes imply that Hadley disrupts an obligatory coital exchange between husband and wife when she later answers the bell call. The fluid temporality associated with the traditional maid/mistress relation, that in the story involves late night undressings and declarations of loyalty and mutual esteem, is contrasted with Mr. Brympton's violent and self-serving lust. While the erratic temporality of service relations was a central concern of modern domestic service because it disturbed familial and marital privacy, Wharton casts maid/mistress relationality as a refuge from patriarchal marriage. These scenes and the bell nonetheless also signal the text's political unconscious, reminding us of domestic service's irregular hours, an exploitative aspect of the industry about which modern servants complained strongly.

The complex and overlapping dynamics of gothic relationality thus reveal Wharton's ambivalent relationship to progressive reforms that sought to apply the core values of American egalitarianism to the domestic sphere in order to liberate all women from excessive performances of

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domesticity. Because Veblen and Gilman both pathologized servants and leisure-class wives as parallel sites of degeneration under traditional patriarchy, the diseased nature of the Brympton household at first appears to be aligned with American progressivism. Insofar as it is a domestic space that doubles as an infirmary for its leisure-class mistress, the Brympton household resembles the classic example of the American Female Gothic, Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper." Just as Hartley is "weak and tottery" from typhoid, Lady Brympton is an infirm angel in the house described as "nervous and vaporish" (22). The sickened Brympton household in "The Lady's Maid's Bell" perhaps sheds an ironic light on Hartley's uncanny attachment to her mistress and identification with Emma. Yet, while modern reformers had begun to challenge servants' surrogate function and their problematic role as companions or friends, Wharton's gothic story—as well as her autobiographical notes—reveals how pre-industrial service relations supplement the modern female imaginary.

As a remainder of outdated institutions and relational structures, domestic service relations take gothic form in the female literary imagination at the turn of twentieth century not simply as a general expression of women's repressed desires under patriarchy, but also to displace anxieties about the domestic wage relation and material differences among women onto a female psyche misconstrued as a collective, female-centered imaginary. While the blending of employers and domestic workers within the psychic narrative seems to eclipse the text's political conscious, there are moments when we can recuperate those labor relations. Domestic intimacy between mistress and maid registers a class panic that is rooted in feminized labor struggles. By disentangling the players within the psychic narrative and situating them back into their class-specific positions, we can see that Wharton's gothic stories reflect social conflicts defining industries of reproductive labor—and women's domestic lives—around the turn of the twentieth century.

§

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Notes

1. This postscript was originally written for *A Backward Glance* (1934), Wharton's autobiography, but was only first published in Scribner's collection of ghost stories in 1973.

2. McKuskey invokes the insights of Peter Stallybrass and Allan Lloyd Smith who show how servants help "to imprint those cultural boundaries as permanent fissures in the bourgeois subject, which thus always threatens to come apart at the seams and burst across the line between normal and deviant desire" (424).

3. The racialized status of servants is important in many American texts, though is less central to the Wharton text I consider here than class and gender.

4. In a recent introduction to *The Female Gothic: New Directions*, Diana Wallace and Andrew Smith provide a comprehensive overview of feminist interpretations of the Female Gothic. They emphasize the complexity of the criticism, both at the moment when Moers coined the genre and after other feminist critics splintered this strand of genre criticism in a variety of ways. For example, in response to poststructuralist challenges to stable categories of woman, in the 1990s the modifier "female" came under radical critique. Feminist critics also came to debate the subversive element of the genre, and others have responded to criticism of it being ahistorical in part because of its reliance upon psychoanalytic categories and adherence to an essentialist notion of femininity, an argument Chris Baldick and Robert Mighall make in their essay "Gothic Criticism."

5. Blackford does quote Judith Rollins's sociological study of domestic service in the late twentieth century in order to explore the power dynamics of the maid/mistress relation—how the maid in real life is meant to be a "surrogate" for a mistress, as Rollins puts it. Though she does not account, as I do, for the specific discursive moment of domestic service reform in the early twentieth century.

6. In her postcolonial revisionist reading "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," Gayatri Spivak posed an important challenge to Gilbert and Gubar's interpretation of gothic doubles. Where Gilbert and Gubar see Bertha in *Jane Eyre* as Jane's darker double, covertly expressing feminine resistance to patriarchal institutions, Spivak urges critics to read Bertha as a silenced subaltern, a monstrous projection of imperialist anxieties. Despite more historical approaches to gothic fiction (like Teresa Goddu's *Gothic America*), psychological reductions of servants have been a consistent trope in feminist criticism.

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7. White draws from poststructuralism and psychoanalysis, articulating how specters of lesbianism are associated with negativity and the lack—signaling what she refers to as the "ghost in the machine, a sign of the body, desire, the other woman" (61)—and are also a manifestation of the deep paranoia Freud interpreted as a psychic defense against homosexuality.

8. Halberstam's discussion of gothic horror and monsters both draws on psychoanalysis and accentuates the need to historicize and complicate the monster's equation with sexual deviance: "The monster is the product of and the symbol for the transformation of identity into sexual identity through the mechanism of failed repression" (9). She emphasizes how the monster is narrativized in such a way that "transforms class/race/gender threat into sexual threat" (10). She thus both adopts the psychoanalytic model but also problematizes it, revealing how cultural forms participate in the psychologization and sexualization of conflicts.

9. By situating Wharton's stories in relation to domestic service reforms, I draw from current scholarship that has begun to historicize gothic literature. In her study *Gothic America,* for example, Teresa Goddu argues that the gothic be read in terms of racial and civic discourses circulating in a variety of media forms. Through these discourses, Goddu articulates how the gothic engages the underbelly of American history: "The American Gothic criticizes America's national myth of new-world innocence by voicing the cultural contradictions that undermine the nation's claim to purity and equality" (10).

10. Dolores Hayden defines these imperatives driving domestic reforms—what she terms "material feminism."

11. See Barbara Ryan's and Faye Dudden's comprehensive historical accounts of domestic service in the nineteenth century. In her more recent study, Barbara Ryan especially focuses on the textual history of domestic service in nineteenth-century literature and periodicals. She traces a loose logic of progression in the modernizing rhetoric of domestic service (occurring over the course of nine decades) that moves from an endorsement of sentiment to one of rationality in relating to non-kin help. While she is interested primarily in the nineteenth century, she ends her study with an afterword that discusses in particular reformer Salmon's aim to de-personalize and professionalize the domestic service industry.

12. I explore the social anxieties underlying Progressive-era domestic reforms in the context of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's writing in my essay "Vulgar Strangers in the Home."

13. The emphasis that Wharton places upon ancestry—and "the original Americans"—is echoed in Gilman's writing. This is a significant parallel in-

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sofar as Gilman was a leading figure in progressive domestic reforms and, like Wharton, returned repeatedly to the maid/mistress relation in her literature. As Lisa Ganobcsick-Williams points out, Gilman was critical of leisure-class ideals and class hierarchy in general, but these progressive views were rooted in an evolutionary perspective supporting the inherent superiority of America's white forefathers (17-18). See Jennifer Kassanoff for more information about Wharton's views on race and patrician lineage in the context of Progressive-era reforms.

14. Recently, Karen Jacobsen has rightly argued that servants in another one of Wharton's ghost stories "All Souls" illustrates Wharton's response to rigorous challenges to inherited wealth that were being institutionalized through New Deal policies in the 1930s. Jacobsen asserts that "All Souls" responds to a political ethos that viewed inherited wealth as un-American. Although servants were often marginalized within the labor reforms, domestic workers voiced their discontent strongly in this period, wanting the Roosevelt administration to acknowledge their specific set of struggles (113-14). In the way it focuses on the elite household, "The Lady's Maid's Bell" also responds anxiously to a progressive ethos of reforms.

15. In "Motherhood According to Bellini" Kristeva de-couples actual mothers—and femininity—from the maternal function, arguing that subjectivity is born out of the maternal function.

16. Stoler's study *Race and the Education of Desire* challenges Foucault by addressing desire in terms of race and nation. In reviewing the two main literary studies that address servants—Bruce Robbins's *The Servant Hand* and Peter Stallybrass and Allon White's chapter in *Politics and Poetics of Transgression*—Stoler also foregrounds racial dynamics in colonial, service relations. By discussing service relations in terms of women's psychosocial development—and the narrative manifestation of that development—I intervene in these conversations in which the bourgeois child referred to seems male by default.

17. For an elaborate description of hierarchy within the servant class, see Daniel Sutherland's historical study. In drawing comparisons among the lady's maid, the governess, and the nursemaid in this article, I do not intend to conflate these figures that have different ranks and functions within the elite household. It is useful, however, to group these figures together insofar as their stations are all defined in terms of intense, interclass homosociality.

18. In her reading of Daphne Du Maurier's *Rebecca* and Celia Fremlin's *The Seven Chars of Chelsea*, Judy Giles has prompted critics to read representations of the maid/mistress relationship in its *modern* historical context, discussing "the ways in which sexuality, consumption, and maid/mistress relationships

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become inextricably wed" in terms of the "historical specificity of the representational codes that constitute them" (36). Importantly, she situates her study in relation to Rita Felski's *The Gender of Modernity,* in which Felski reveals how modern tropes are gendered in contradictory ways. The gendered trope that Giles finds useful here is the notion of the feminine as a refuge from a masculinized, modern history: "This positioning of women, home and the private sphere as beyond the logic of modernity not only denies women a place in the historical record but also presents the private/feminine as outside and untouched by the complex meshing of modern phenomena" (37). Giles thus intends to engage the historical specificity of women's very modern positioning and perceptions. As domestic service was an important discursive aspect of women's positioning in modern culture she mentions how numerous media forms suggested not only pragmatic but relational ways to improve service (38).

19. This passage from Freud's essay "The Uncanny" speaks directly to what Luce Irigaray considers a phallogocentric conflation of female genitalia with the uncanny:

> It often happens that neurotic men declare that they feel there is something uncanny about the female genital organs. This unheimlich place, however, is the entrance to the former Heim [home] of all human beings, to the place where each one of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning. There is a joking saying that 'Love is home-sickness'; and whenever a man dreams of a place or a country and says to himself, while he is still dreaming: 'this place is familiar to me, I've been here before,' we may interpret the place as being his mother's genitals or her body. In this case too, then, the unheimlich is what was once heimisch, familiar; the prefix 'un' ['un-'] is the token of repression.

According to Irigaray's paradigm articulated in *The Sex Which Is Not One,* however, the clitoral—as opposed to the vaginal—emphasis of the bell disrupts a phallogocentric order based on heterosexual binaries through its autoerotic connotation (28).

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Early Civil Rights "Voice Work" in Richard Wright and Zora Neale Hurston

Megan Obourn

The differences between Richard Wright and Zora Neale Hurston are both well known and highly exaggerated. Though they mutually rejected each other's literary aesthetic approaches to representations of racial blackness, they shared a political aesthetic approach—an approach I will define below as "voice work"—to the emergent political power of black female voice in the United States. The now infamous mutual literary reviews of Hurston by Wright and Wright by Hurston have led many critics to read their work as oppositional, and continue to shape the ways in which we read these authors as representative of a set of dichotomies in African American literary history: sociological versus anthropological, communal versus individualistic, masculine versus feminine, political versus aesthetic, rhetorical versus authentic, northern versus southern, and communist versus folk.[1] Wright and Hurston, however, did not frame their mutual critiques through all of these binaries, but rather focused specifically on the gendered nature of the other's text and his or her narrative representation of voice. Wright attempted to distance his writing from Hurston's more "feminine" narrative techniques that "cloak" her prose in "facile sensuality" ("Their Eyes" 17), while Hurston dismissed Wright's "masculine" aesthetics with her comments on the lack of "act[s] of understanding and sympathy" in *Uncle Tom's Children* ("Uncle Tom" 3). In addition to critiquing each other's positions through reading the other as hyper-feminized or hyper-masculinized, each critiqued the other for improper use of dialect, an important form of political voice work in their respective texts. Hurston says of Wright, "Since the author is himself a Negro, his dialect is a puzzling thing. One wonders how he arrived at it. Certainly he does not write by ear unless he is tone-deaf" (4). And Wright calls Hurston's use of dialect a continuation of "minstrel technique" ("Their Eyes" 17). It is worth putting some pressure on the particularities of these reciprocal

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critiques. It may be that the things Wright and Hurston found most troubling about each other's work were the very aspects of their own projects they held most dear—i.e. an explicit interrogation of the gendered nature of racial politics and the political possibilities of voice work in character representation and audience address.

Historically, the power of voice has been a theme central to African American literature and literary criticism. Writing out of a history of enforced silence, African American authors have represented voice as an important source of personal and political agency; and the search for language in African American fiction is often simultaneously a search for identity and an affirmation of individual selfhood.[2] Much the same can be said for women's fiction and feminist literary concerns. Women have historically been constructed as women by silencing their access to public speech. Ursula K. Le Guin has theorized this as a "split" in voice: a "father tongue" that speaks in the language of public discourse and social power versus a "mother tongue" that is interlocutionary, conversational, and that "expects an answer" (149). Gaining voice is not, however, a simple process. Political freedom, including the freedom of speech, has historically in no way insured a personal or social ability to voice one's sense of identity. Frederick Douglass says of his own story that the mere ability to speak it was not enough. "My simple narrative," he says, "was an old story and to go through it night after night was a task altogether too mechanical for my nature. . . .I must speak the word that seemed to me the word to be spoken by me" (qtd. in Callahan 18). One way of continuing to pay attention to voice in women's and African American literature while avoiding what Douglass here points to as an overly simplistic understanding of the voice of the oppressed as transparent self-expression is to think about narrative constructions of voice not as external articulations of a preexisting but silenced interiority (or internal minority), but instead as voice work, which attempts a rearticulation of the field that defines what can be politically and socially said or understood and how it can be said or understood.

Voice work is a way of conceiving of and potentially altering the ways in which speaking and hearing can function. It is a term for theorizing a set of political tools that often function beyond our individual control. I choose the term voice work for several reasons. First, in structurally echoing "speech act," it captures the active, creative, and social nature of language as presented in speech-act theory.[3] I use voice rather than speech

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to acknowledge the political importance of the connections among individual subjectivity, social identity, and voice, as well as to acknowledge voice work theory's debt to previous work on voice in African Americanist and feminist literary criticism. Finally, I choose "work" following Hannah Arendt's use of it as a term with which to talk about speech and action together. According to Arendt, action is the basis of all politics. One must insert oneself into the world with action, which is the beginning of change. However, speech is also required for "the disclosure of the agent in the act" (180). The truly political act for Arendt arises from this "revelatory character of action and speech" (192) which does not perform work in the sense of producing a product but is work in the Aristotelian sense of "to live well" as a performance, an activity, and an experience (207). "The public realm," says Arendt, "the space within the world which men need in order to appear at all, is . . . more specifically 'the work of man' than is the work of his hands or the labor of his body" (208). Voice work is a theoretical tool for articulating what literary texts do in the active processes of being read and circulated to create a public space of appearance through what Arendt terms the "living deed and spoken word" (206).

Jacques Rancière's theory of political disagreement can help us clarify the specific ways in which voice work is political. Politics, Rancière argues, is not about the systems through which a state or society functions, but rather about what can and cannot be said or heard.[4] Politics consists in disagreement, by which he means,

> a determined kind of speech situation: one in which one of the interlocutors at once understands and does not understand what the other is saying. Disagreement is not the conflict between one who says white and another who says black. It is the conflict between one who says white and another who also says white but does not understand the same thing by it or does not understand that the other is saying the same thing in the name of whiteness. (x)

In African Americanist, feminist, and black feminist literature and literary theory, voice work takes on just this kind of political valence. Political voice is heard not when a person speaks, but when "contention over what speaking means constitutes the very rationality of the speech situation" (xi). Voice work is the constitution of the rationality of the speech situation and the creation of both the voices heard there and the hearing audience to which they speak.

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Though much critical work has been done with voice as individual and communal expression, voice work as the investigation of the politics of aesthetics and of politically charged speech situations needs further exploration, particularly in relation to representations of racial blackness and womanhood in the United States. The current historical definitions we have for African American political movements in the US at the dawn of what is now thought of as the long civil rights era[5] (interracial communism, cultural nationalism, desegregation, to name a few) are in many ways about opening new symbolic spaces of articulation and making, in Rancière's words, a "part of those who have no part" (14). Nevertheless, the particularly gendered ways in which these movements are treated (following the historical sexism inherent in their practices) do not provide many models for reading women writers as producing radical or directly politically engaged texts, nor do they provide frameworks for reading the work of male writers (particularly those participating in the social protest tradition) as purposefully provoking and promoting feminist responses. Feminist critiques of African American and women's literature continue to value authentic representations of self and voice as self-expression; racial and class-based critiques and histories continue to focus on the men who had the most access to being heard in the existent public sphere.[6] I suggest that both Hurston's and Wright's use of voice work led to complex articulations of the possibilities for racial and gender politics at the beginning of the long civil rights era, articulations that may be for us, in an era of multicultural "post-feminist" liberalism, difficult to hear.[7]

Uniting Hurston and Wright

In 1974 June Jordan called for a rethinking of the Wright/Hurston divide, proclaiming that she did "not accept that Wright and Hurston should be perceived, properly, as antipathetic in the wellsprings of their work" (288). Jordan's vision has yet to be fully realized in literary criticism. This is not to say that no work has been done to represent the two authors' works in relation to one another. Werner Sollors argues that reading Wright and Hurston through their respective disciplinary ties (sociology and anthropology) reveals what we think of as inherent oppositions to be complementary perspectives seen through different professional lenses. Both writers, Sollors argues, present representative characters that speak for the condition of the Negro and see modernism as a disruption of

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folk ways of understanding the world. Additionally, William J. Maxwell devotes a chapter of his *New Negro, Old Left* to rethinking our received understandings about the Wright/Hurston debate, arguing that communism and anthropology functioned respectively for Hurston and Wright as modernizing movements that "ethnicized" populations and valued folk culture (165). Ultimately, Maxwell uses this comparison to recoup a reading of Wright as recognizing folk culture's "revolutionary significance" (178), a reading that Maxwell feels has been obscured by anti-communist sentiment in the criticism addressing Wright since the mid-twentieth century. Most current criticism, however, continues to use the Wright/Hurston debate to highlight either Wright's or Hurston's distinct literary or political position, a distinction that most often runs along lines of gender and gendered definitions of politics.

In the remainder of this essay I will look at the ways in which Hurston in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Wright in *Uncle Tom's Children* and *Native Son* engage in the kind of radical black feminism that Hortense Spillers designates the "*claiming* of the monstrosity" that is the "female with the potential to 'name'" (480). Hurston and Wright, in attempting to claim this "monstrosity" of female naming, reveal it to be both an overpowering voice and a voice that cannot yet be heard in the existing discourses of American and African American politics. I will look at voice work in represented speech and action as well as audience address to explore the ways in which the works of Hurston and Wright share political investments in the power of women's voice work. Ultimately, both writers present a complicated and never fully realized (on a national hegemonic level) way of thinking racial politics that challenges the liberal model of individualism, representation, and transparent expression that has taken hold in contemporary US identity-based politics. In the words of Nikhil Pal Singh, "the dominant flavor of contemporary discussions of race and nation reproduce . . . liberal nationalist conventions" which "monopolize the discussion of civic identity and political expression at the expense of a full rendering of black political subjectivity" (43). Though the (short) civil rights movement is considered to be about making social and legal claims to inclusion in preexisting American political, social, legal and economic systems, Singh argues that, "black freedom struggles have not only been about obtaining market access, equal citizenship, or integrating black people into common national subjectivity. Rather, they represent the counter-statements of political subjects who have struggled to widen

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the circle of common humanity" (44). In other words, the long civil rights struggle has always incorporated a politics of voice work in which counter-statements work to construct new possibilities for political subjectivity, to make a part of those who have no part so that they can enter into political disagreement.

Hurston and voice in feminist and African Americanist criticism

Though some recent Hurston scholarship has begun reading her work in relation to a range of national and international political, economic, and materialist structures and practices,[8] this move toward placing Hurston in broader public and materialist contexts tends to move away from feminist-oriented arguments and concerns over voice.[9] Arguments that employ a predominantly gender-based framework, on the other hand, continue to stress Janie's self-actualization and achievement of voice.[10] I would like to return here to feminist informed discussions of voice in Hurston's work to challenge the frequent figuration of Hurston as presenting an authentic, self-expressive black or female voice and to reorient our understandings of *Their Eyes* in relation to the theory of political voice work. In so doing we can begin integrating readings of Hurston invested in voice and feminist politics with more contemporary materialist and more narrowly politically contextualized readings of her work, as well as integrating them with the work of Wright.

A brief overview of canonical readings of voice in Hurston provides a foundation for thinking about her employment of voice work. Perhaps the most well-known and influential argument concerning voice in *Their Eyes* is Gates's claim that Hurston has written a "speakerly text" (158) that registers an "authentic black voice" (156) and a "linguistic presence of the [black American] literary tradition" (165). Gates connects this search for voice in the text to "a search for the self" (158), i.e. a unique black self that is discovered through a textual version of black oral tradition. Using free indirect discourse, Hurston is able to capture the double self of the African American subject and the double voice of mimesis and diegesis in the literary text. Cheryl Wall similarly argues that voice in *Their Eyes* is about self-discovery. She suggests that Hurston's is the "first authentic black female voice in American literature" (76) represented in the character of Janie, whose "self-discovery depends on her learning to manipulate language" (89). Janie learns to use a voice that is part of the community to insist on her own female autonomy.

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Barbara Johnson, John F. Callahan, and Michael Awkward have also focused on narrative voice in *Their Eyes,* but they suggest that not only is the individual self accessed through learning to manipulate and express the complexities of a desire for subjecthood and autonomy in language, but that this voice is more importantly about communication. Johnson suggests that Janie's "authentic voice" comes from her ability to recognize and speak her own self-difference, "to assume and articulate the incompatible forces involved in her own division" ("Metaphor" 212). Callahan sees *Their Eyes* as having an adapted "call and response" (116) structure which not only "fus[es] individual and collaborative narrative authority," but also calls to readers, asking them (in a version of Le Guin's mother tongue) "to respond as listeners and participants in the work of storytelling" (118). This structure also teaches readers how to listen and respond in constructive ways. Through characters like Nanny and Jody, female and male readers alike are warned that an authoritative or hubristic voice will not function to create community but only more hierarchy, and asks readers to listen and respond to perspectives and truths that may threaten their own sense of self and authority. Michael Awkward also sees the narrative structure of *Their Eyes* as structuring "(comm)unity" (14) and as providing a "powerful black cultural voice" (17). He insists on the connection between voice and action. Janie, he says, "seems to issue a general condemnation of verbal performances that are not (and *cannot be*) supported by appropriate action" (16). Nanny, Jody, and even Tea Cake represent aspects of voice without action. Only Janie's use of speech and silence are active and can affect her own and others' lives.

Such canonical critiques can already be seen as implicitly suggesting a politics of voice work. Janie's articulation of a combination of discourses incompatible as yet in the larger social and political field is a political gesture in that it looks to make a place for non-representative narratives for black women in the United States—narratives that do not assume that because a character is a black woman that she speaks for black womanhood, that do not voice identity directly via its bodily representation. I want to add to these understandings of the novel by pointing out that its political critique is not merely implicit. It explicitly announces itself as a critique of and therefore a part of national, public political discourse and partakes in it by opening up space for other potential subject positions. It acts through voice work in the Arendtian sense. Janie's childhood nickname, "Alphabet" (9), announces her explicitly as a metaphor for speech and naming. As her nickname suggests, Janie represents a theory of language that is not about expressing a pre-existing self—the name

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"Alphabet" having been given to her because she had many names, none of which was able to name a self or identity already there. Interestingly, neither "colored" nor "Negro" appear to be among the names given Janie (she doesn't recognize herself as black until she sees herself in a photo), also suggesting that Janie's voice work involves attempts to rename, to name beyond the limiting but inescapable categories of race and gender. Janie also figures her story as political discourse, telling Pheoby that she's been "a delegate to the big 'ssociation of life . . . de big convention of livin'" (6).

The all-black community to which Janie returns at the beginning of the novel is also connected to political voice work in that it is a community in search of new possibilities of expression. This opening of new speech situations is figured as dangerous and violent: "She left the porch pelting her back with unasked questions. They hoped the answers were cruel and strange" (4). Nevertheless, it is also a situation of potential freedom, a hope for "strange" (that is, new) answers in a space where "words walk[ed] without masters" (2). Janie is unwilling to share her new knowledge and ways of naming with the town only because the speech situation is not one in which she can be heard. It is not yet one in which the townspeople's desire for "new answers" could be satisfied. Janie's comment, "If they wants to see and know, why they don't come kiss and be kissed?" (6) is Hurston's commentary on the voice work left to be done, the need to constitute new rationalities for the political speech situation for black female subjecthood in the US.

Hurston's presentation of Nanny reinforces the fact that Janie is representative of broader public and political voice work. Nanny's dream to "preach a great sermon about colored women sittin' on high" and her corresponding desire for Janie to take "de text" and "a stand on high ground" (Hurston 16) may be less a critique of Nanny's authoritativeness or hubris, as Callahan suggests, but rather Hurston's way of making clear to the reader that this public pulpit does not yet exist. Nanny's "text" can't be heard because there is no public political sphere in which either she or her daughter could be heard—a situation that Janie begins to address by finding a place to be "heard" within the public space of Joe's store. The scene in which Janie publicly announces to Jody: "When you pull down yo' britches, you look lak de change uh life" (79), is arguably her most active and successful public and political articulation in the novel. Gates names this as the moment that "Janie gains her voice and becomes

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a speaking subject" (187). And Wall sees this linguistic act as "an essential step toward self-reclamation" (92). Critics have also noted that this claiming of a powerful black female voice is so effective that it, in fact, kills Jody.[11] What I want to suggest is that while Hurston *is* forwarding a call-and-response model based on an important connection between voice and action, the connection between voice and action is not, as Awkward suggests, "natural" but rather political. The call-and-response not only establishes black or black female autonomy and community, but is also a political call that asks for a political response, particularly from black women. It is simultaneously a call to respond and a recognition of the destructive power that women can wield in responding.

Hurston was well aware of the possible readings and repercussions of her texts. She knew her writing would be judged in the context of black aesthetic and literary cultural movements. There is no reason not to assume that Janie's story is Hurston's attempt to negotiate demands for a representative black aesthetic in the same way that Bigger's story is for Wright.[12] Additionally, there is no reason not to take the violence of Hurston's novel as seriously as that of Wright's. Janie kills Joe with her entrance into the public sphere. In 1943 Hurston wrote to Countee Cullen on the subject of desegregation. After claiming (falsely) that she had "no viewpoint on the subject particularly," she goes on to argue that "the white man is not going to surrender for mere words what he has fought and died for, and . . . if we want anything substantial we must *speak with the same weapons* [of violence]." Hurston insists: "either we must do something about it that the white man will understand . . . or shut up. . .If some of us must die for human justice, then let us die" (Borders 92, italics mine). Here Hurston explicitly articulates a politics of voice work. It is not enough to publicize injustices. One must change the rationality of the speaking situation such that those in power will "understand." She suggests that this is a potentially violent move and the cost may be death. One of *Their Eyes Were Watching God's* structures of address is a black feminist activist voice addressing black women and indicating to them the power of their own voices. It also addresses black men, suggesting that their lack of voice work (i.e. attempting like Jody to be a "big voice" via extant masculinist power) might cost them their own lives at the hands/mouths of black women. The text registers the paradox of black female voice work resulting from a political wisdom that knows that without a discursive situation in which these voices can be heard they may become

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violent; yet that violence becomes necessary if those voices cannot be heard. Hurston's text is a call for black female voice and a positing of the need to create (perhaps violently) a space for interracial, intraracial, and cross-gender understanding. In the following section I will trace these same imperatives through Wright's *Uncle Tom's Children* and *Native Son* to demonstrate the similarities between Hurston's and Wright's politics and their literary use of character representation and audience address.

Wright and the mother tongue

Hurston and Wright are often contrasted in their relations to their female characters, female audiences, and feminism in general. While Hurston is considered a foremother of modern feminisms, Wright is most often portrayed as at best unconcerned with the rights/lives of women and at worst a misogynistic writer who has no qualms about using female characters in the most abusive of ways.[13] Alice Walker, Awkward, and Gates (among others) connect Hurston to a literary lineage of black women writers. Walker lists Hurston among names like Phillis Wheatley and Frances Harper as one of the few who represent and carry on the "signature" of strong artistic black women (238, 243). Awkward places Hurston in a tradition of "Afro-American women novel[ists]" (6) whose works "form a harmonious system" of "cooperative textual interactions" (7) based on a mother/daughter model. And Gates explicitly compares Hurston's and Wright's representations of their own mothers to argue that Hurston celebrates female voice while Wright silences it. Gates quotes Hurston describing her mother just before her death, unable to talk and looking at Zora in a way that made her understand that she was looking to Zora "to speak for her" (167). In the quote from Wright concerning his mother's death, Wright says she "told me that she could not endure the pain, that she wanted to die. I held her hand and begged her to be quiet. That night I ceased to react to my mother; my feelings were frozen" (Gates 167). Gates tells us that these passages clearly indicate "how far apart Hurston and Wright stand in the tradition."

While it is true that Hurston and Wright narrate the loss of their mothers differently, the fact that both writers insist on the moment of their mothers' deaths as affecting their sense of themselves and their ability and desire to write places Wright's and Hurston's literary projects closer together than we might at first assume. Hurston's anecdote quite

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clearly announces her feeling that she can, and is asked to, speak for other women, thus connecting her to a tradition of female voice. Wright's anecdote, though it appears to be about silencing women's voices, in fact constructs the female voice as more powerful than does Hurston's. He does not silence his mother, for she continues to speak. A careful reading suggests that he is not asking for her not to speak at all, but rather for her not to announce her defeat. The cessation of feeling described here indicates that her insistence on announcing a desire to die or give up led to his response of shutting down his own feeling. This anecdote can be read in relation to many of Wright's female characters as well as his implicit address to a female audience, particularly in *Uncle Tom's Children*. A literary representation in which women's voices are silenced is *not* the same as the text itself silencing women or asking them to remain silent. As in the anecdote quoted by Gates, Wright's fiction is actually calling on women to speak and live, not to shut down or remain quiet or ask others to speak for them. Like Hurston, Wright is aware of the power of women's voices to do violence (particularly to black men). Yet he is also, like Hurston, calling on women to use their voices in a way that allows for political action. Wright's texts suggest that unless women are able to do this, there will be neither communal nor individual voice for African Americans.

Before I turn to the texts themselves, I would like to point out one other aspect of Wright's relation to literary traditions that often gets overlooked or oversimplified. *Uncle Tom's Children* explicitly, through its title, places itself in a female literary tradition, specifically in relation to the "female" genre of sentimental protest.[14] In Richard Yarborough's introduction to the Perennial Edition of *Uncle Tom's Children* he mentions naturalist novels, communist theory, Chicago school sociology, pulp novels, and the work of the New Negro Renaissance among Wright's literary and intellectual influences, but he does not mention nineteenth-century sentimental novels, though Wright's use of characters and situations to engage the reader and provoke an emotional response is in fact quite similar to the sentimental novel. Though it is well known that Wright wrote of *Uncle Tom's Children* that he regretted the fact that he had "written a book which even bankers' daughters could read and weep over and feel good about" ("How Bigger" 454) this does not, as Yarborough seems to suggest, indicate that the text was never meant to employ sentimental literary tropes. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, perhaps the most famous American

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sentimental novel, certainly did not discourage tears. At the same time, it was not supposed to make readers "feel good" or morally justified simply for having read it. If this were the case, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* would not have had the powerful social and political impact that it did. Wright, in *Uncle Tom's Children,* engages some of the same literary tropes and politicized aesthetics as Stowe. *Uncle Tom's Children* does, to some extent, use a "language of tears" to provoke readers' emotional responses in the service of asking them to act in a political capacity even if they do not have access to an official political realm. Jane Tompkins writes of sentimental fiction that it "represents a monumental effort to reorganize culture from the woman's point of view" and "is remarkable for its intellectual complexity, ambition, and resourcefulness; and that, in certain cases, it offers a critique of American society far more devastating than any delivered by better-known critics such as Hawthorne and Melville" (83). *Uncle Tom's Children* is also an effort to reorganize culture from an African American point of view and, like the sentimental novels to which Tompkins refers, its intellectual complexity and ambition provide a devastating critique of US society in the first half of the twentieth century. Yarborough concludes that "*Uncle Tom's Children* constitutes a self-conscious rejection of the past" that breaks with earlier literary traditions opening up space for "countless black authors who followed in his wake" proclaiming, "Uncle Tom is dead!" (xxix). Yet if the novel were simply a rejection of the past and of earlier literary styles, representations, and traditions it would not be titled "Uncle Tom's *Children*." Wright might have called it "Uncle Tom Is Dead," but he did not. His title explicitly indicates that the book is part of a lineage, his characters the "children" of Stowe's characters and the "children" of a world in which *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was so profoundly influential (in both positive and negative ways). Moreover, the stories that make up *Uncle Tom's Children* are themselves "descendants" of Stowe's novel. However much Wright might be repulsed by the idea of sentimentality without action, he clearly recognizes Stowe, for better or for worse, as a literary foremother—one who, incidentally, also recognized the need for Uncle Toms to die and be replaced by former slaves who will, like George Harris and the list of free black men provided at the end of Stowe's novel, fight for full citizenship whether in the US or a country of their own, and accumulate property and power.[15]

A great deal of the voice work of *Uncle Tom's Children* is achieved structurally. The text is framed by two stories about women. This fact itself

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indicates the importance of female characters to the text and suggests an implied female as well as male audience.[16] The first story, "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow," appears as an autobiographical sketch, situated at the beginning of the book to give more authenticity to the fictional stories in the collection. Yet it is also a way to introduce the reader to the power of women's voices to either reinforce or undermine Jim Crow ideology. While the main character of the story is the young black autobiographical male narrator who goes through multiple stages of "Jim Crow education" (7), the person who starts the narrator on this educational path and who ultimately has the power to take him off it is his mother. After a fight with the "white boys who lived beyond the tracks" (1) that leaves the narrator with a gash requiring three stitches, his mother beats him and tells him: "I was never to fight any more wars. I was never, never, under any conditions, to fight *white* folks again" (2). In the first two pages of the book we are shown that it is black women and particularly black mothers who hold the key to dislodging Jim Crow ideology and that it is in their role as "good mothers," i.e. as protectors of their children and reproducers of social and cultural knowledge, that they fail in this political potential. While many of the women in *Uncle Tom's Children* appear to be mouthpieces for white dominance (Grannie's "Don yuh go thinkn sin, Bob!" [67] when Bob wants to steal a boat from white people during a flood to save his family) or weak figures unable to act (Big Boy's mother's refrain, "Nobody but the good Lawd kin hep us now" [40]), this introduction implies that it is by conformity to heavily reinforced gender roles, not by inherent gender-based weaknesses, that this is the case.

The last story, "Bright and Morning Star," presents a woman as its hero. This is striking not only because of the rather subordinate roles women have played in earlier stories but moreover because it is the only story in which the hero acts in a way that actually changes his or her environment. The other stories have heroes but the best these heroes can do is choose in what manner they run or, more often, die. Not that this is an insubstantial accomplishment. As Yarborough puts it, "choosing the terms of one's own death in a world that refuses to let you live as a human being constitutes an existential triumph of no small order" (xxiv). Still, it is not ultimately existential triumphs that this text celebrates, but rather political and social triumphs. And the only tale in which one is clearly to be found is "Bright and Morning Star."[17] In this story, Sue, an elderly black woman, is politicized by the labor organizing of her sons in an interracial

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communist group. Born and raised with a strong religious faith learned from her own mother that allowed her to "obey the laws of white folks with a soft smile of secret knowing," she is given "a new [vision], different, but great and strong enough to fling her into the light of another grace" (225). This new political faith is challenged when Sue's son Johnny-Boy is captured by the sheriff and tortured for the names of his comrades. Sue knows that if he talks he could be spared and that another member of the party is already headed to the sheriff to inform him of those involved. Sue maintains a strong political voice throughout the story and even though Johnny-Boy is the only person left of importance in her life, she decides not only to give up her own life, and not only to give up her son's life, but also to let him be tortured in front of her while she waits with a hidden gun to shoot the traitor and keep the names of the organizers from the law. She succeeds in this and thus in this story the death of our main character is not simply a story of fighting to die on one's own terms but a story in which a woman's voice work (her ability to speak and to decide when and where to speak so as to be heard) and corresponding actions lead to a victory for the interracial labor organization. Throughout the story Wright implicitly calls to a female audience, suggesting that they respond by entering a space of political voice work, even if that means giving up traditional ideas of womanhood and motherhood by being willing to let children die or be hurt and to kill if necessary. Wright does not ask his female audience to relinquish their faith or love of their children and families, but calls for them (in a way that echoes Hurston) to redefine their "vision" of right and wrong, and to put freedom before safety.

Like *Their Eyes* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin, Uncle Tom's Children* is written to a broad audience, asking for readers to rethink their understandings of racial hierarchy and gender norms. But it is also, like the aforementioned novels, addressed specifically to a female audience and it calls on women to take whatever actions are within their power to effect political change. "Bright and Morning Star" makes it clear that there are certain acts, both speech acts and physical acts, that are available only to women. For example, Sue has to ask Reva, a small, thin, white girl, to walk a mile through cold and mud to tell the comrades that the sheriff knows about the meeting. This is presented as a responsibility of Reva's precisely because of her femaleness and her whiteness: "Being a woman, Reva was not suspect; she would *have* to go. It was just as natural for Reva to go back through the cold rain as it was for her [Sue] to iron night and day

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or fur Sug to be in jail" (228). It is not natural in an essentialized way, but natural considering the world they live in and what it means to be white or black, male or female. Likewise, as an older, black woman Sue is perhaps one of the only comrades who can approach the scene of her son's torture by the sheriff and his cronies. She does this by acting exactly as they would expect her to.[18] She shows up with a sheet (under which she carries Johnny-Boy's gun) and in submissive language tells them she has brought the sheet to take away the body. Thinking she has come to save her son, they encourage her to try to get him to talk. They break his legs in front of her. She wants to kill him to end his pain but waits, knowing that she most likely will only have one shot with which to kill and silence the traitor. She succeeds and though she and Johnny-Boy are killed, she is able to die telling her enemy: "Yuh didn't git what yuh wanted! N yuh ain gonna nevah git it!" (236)—a success far greater than that of most characters in the book. By representing Sue as the most politically effective character, and the most respectable female character in the book, Wright not only, as Higashida argues, "insists that issues of gender ... are integral to conceptualizing a revolutionary praxis and subjectivity" (400), but also implicitly calls on the black female reader to let go of her fears for her lovers, sons, and daughters, enough to use her voice and silence politically.[19]

Politics of address in *Their Eyes* and *Native Son*

Lacking in the readings that oppose Hurston and Wright—such as Gates's argument that Wright "counted himself among those few Negroes who could tell not only their own story but also the woeful tale of their pathetic, voiceless black countrymen" (166), while Hurston, "search[ed] for a telling form of language [and] define[d] the search for the self" (168)—is an acknowledgment that both *Native Son* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* are to a great extent novels about what *can't* be said. *Their Eyes* does the voice work of producing a "speakerly text" in which a black communal voice can take its place within an American literary tradition. Yet Hurston includes the critically contentious scene in the white courtroom in which Janie is not able to speak her own story or represent herself in a public, political space. We might think of the entirety of *Native Son* as a version of this courtroom scene. Without the access to a successful all-black community (Eatonville) that Hurston had, Wright's question

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becomes not how to represent an authentic African American voice, but how to speak as an African American in a white-dominated and defined world. Bigger is never, as Janie is, able to make himself understood through his own voice. Nevertheless, voice work is foregrounded in both plots as a central personal and political struggle. Both authors run up against the Rancièrian political in which contention over what speaking means constitutes the rationality of the speech situation. The voice work of both texts helps the reader to understand the nature of the current political speech situation, as well as challenging that speech situation through construction of and address to particular audiences. There are parallels between the ways in which others' voices must be negotiated or at times silenced to make room for one's own ability to speak. Both texts make demands on their readers to hear differently and both construct and speak directly to a female audience.

As discussed above, Hurston gives us specific textual cues, asking us to read voice in *Their Eyes* as an explicitly political expression. Hurston also positions her audience such that they are forced to respond to the paucity of possibilities for political expression and the need to construct radically new political speech situations. Hurston's decision not to have Janie's speech represented in either direct or free indirect discourse in the courtroom provides a model for the politics of speaking publicly in the narrative aesthetics of the work more generally, as well as representing the limitations faced by black women writers and speakers in Hurston's historical moment. Janie's silence in the courtroom has yet to be satisfactorily explained by critics. This, I argue, is because it is purposefully unsatisfying. It is not a moment of empowerment but one revealing the necessity for more political change, more contestation over what speaking means and who and what can be heard as a legitimate speaker and as legitimate content. In a courtroom in racist America, Janie's voice literally could not be heard. But this is not because she can't get the legal right to a trial, which she has and which "works" to establish her innocence. Rancière suggests that "politics exists because the logos is never simply speech, because it is always indissolubly the *account* that is made of this speech: the account by which a sonorous emission is understood as speech, capable of enunciating what is just, whereas some other emission is merely perceived as a noise signaling pleasure or pain, consent or revolt" (22-23). In Hurston's fictional world Janie is able to enunciate what she feels is just and therefore be found not guilty by the court. Hurston's actual text, however, is

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unable to represent this speech, suggesting that this is a politics that still needs to be constructed, a space in which black female voices still risk being perceived merely as "noise." Thus the aesthetics of the scene—the way the reader experiences it subjectively—has profound political valence in that it "speaks to" what cannot be spoken directly by Hurston or Janie.

Wright places a similar emphasis on both interpersonal and public speech. *Native Son* can be read as an extended courtroom scene not because of the trial itself (though certainly in this space black voices cannot be heard), but because Bigger is never in a space in which the racial politics of his environment do not impact his ability to speak and be heard. Max's character functions as an extended metaphor for speaking in the political realm. He is the man who attempts to speak for Bigger in the realm of state discourse. And, as a man representing a potential connection to the state and the political, he is the person to whom Bigger feels the greatest need to make himself heard. "How could he get into that man a sense of what he wanted?" Bigger asks himself after the trial, "If he could only tell him!" (422). And a page later: "But he had to *make* him know!" (423). The novel does not end with the court's verdict; it ends with Bigger's attempt to speak in the political space defined by Max's presence. This attempt, however, fails. Max is unable to speak for Bigger in the courtroom. He repeats arguments that already register as speech but he is unable to make, as Rancière would have it, a part of those who have no part. He relies on figuring Bigger as a passive body. He does not ask the court to recognize Bigger's own speech, and is able neither to comprehend Bigger nor to provide a space in which Bigger can speak and be heard:

> [Bigger] could not talk. Max reached over and placed a hand on this shoulder, and Bigger could tell by its touch that Max did not know, had no suspicion of what he wanted, of what he was trying to say. . . .Distractedly, he gazed about the cell, trying to remember where he had heard words that could help him. He could recall none. (422)

In the end Max turns away from Bigger's request to acknowledge "the reality of his living" (423), i.e. his actual desires and motives: "I didn't know I was alive in this world until I felt things hard enough to kill for them" (429). However, Bigger is able to affect Max by making his eyes "full of terror." Forcing Max to turn away in terror is Bigger's most pow-

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erful and, like Janie speaking to Jody, potentially most violent political act; and it happens in the form of voice work. He has spoken to Max in a way that forces him to hear differently. Though Max as representation of the political realm of speech does not change enough for Bigger to be fully heard, his normative ways of hearing are challenged such that he must understand enough to *feel* what Bigger is saying. Like the examples from *Uncle Tom's Children* and *Their Eyes,* this scene indicates both the rarity and the potential violence of truly political speech.

Similarly, both novels are concerned with what speech gets silenced (does not get to be heard as voice) so that others may speak. In *Their Eyes* every domestic partner that Janie has must be silenced in one way or another for her to be able to attain a voice. Nanny, Logan, Jody, and even Tea Cake are all heard as powerful voices by Janie, Nanny perhaps the most powerful among them. Overcoming Nanny's voice, which is powerful because it draws on racial and gender ideologies of the dominant white supremacist society, is not presented by Hurston as a celebratory event, but as one that requires Nanny to die having never experienced her life other than as an "infinity of conscious pain" (23-24). Likewise, in *Native Son* Bigger finds it necessary to overcome, by silencing, a series of female voices. The most powerful in relation to Bigger, if, like Nanny, one of the least powerful in the fictional world of the text, is Bigger's mother. The novel begins with his mother's voice demanding that he silence the alarm. Repeatedly, like the autobiographical mother in *Uncle Tom's Children,* she encourages him not to fight, not to respond to the alarms going off internally. She insists that working hard as a servant in a rich white household will "make a man out of" him (101). And she is the only person that he insists on not talking to while in his jail cell: "Bigger cringed. Not this! Not here; not *now*!" (295). Bigger's mother does come into the cell and the family has what appears to be a moment of bonding and identification. This identification is undone, however, by Bigger's mother's plea to Mrs. Dalton. The effect of shame that Bigger's mother's words have on him is more powerful than any other in the book, implying that while Bigger's mother's voice holds great power over him it also holds great destructive power, perhaps the power that led Bigger to murder: "Bigger's shame for his mother amounted to hate" (302). Again, the black female voice has incredible power in relation to black men, but this power becomes destructive via women's uncritical enactment of dominant ideals of femininity and motherhood.

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The other two women whose voices clearly threaten Bigger and whose voices he can and does silence are Mary and Bessie. Though both Jan and Mary approach Bigger it is she, says Bigger, who "acted and talked in a way that made me hate her" (305). And it is in the act of silencing Mary with a pillow that Bigger accidentally kills her. Similarly, Bigger says that he killed Bessie, "To keep her from talking" (352). The threats these female characters pose suggest that, given the highly politically constructed and tenuous nature of black American men's relationship to masculinity and sexuality, women's voices are intensely powerful and potentially dangerous, rather than (as has been suggested by most critics) that women in *Native Son* are less significant than men to Bigger or simply the receptacles of masculine violence. This is not to suggest that violence against women is not prevalent in the narrative of *Native Son*, but that as readers we are expected to recognize that the narrative is focalized through Bigger Thomas, a character whose actions we are not intended to have a comfortable relation to and a character who dramatizes rather than announces the politics of the novel. Bigger's silencing of women is the inverse of his political voice work with Max. This kind of violence has no political effects and in fact only reinforces Bigger's already powerless position. As readers we are led to understand that Bigger misunderstood the power of female voice and the power of women as allies in his own struggle via Wright's positioning of women as audience.[20]

Aesthetics of reception

Native Son is a novel that has historically and continues to offend and anger female critics and readers. In 2006, Mary Helen Washington said of the novel: "I have always found it so misogynistic that I resist rereading it or anything about it" (168). Wright himself presented it, against *Uncle Tom's Children*, in masculinized terms: "so hard and deep that [readers] would have to face it without the consolation of tears" ("How Bigger" 454). Nevertheless, there is little indication that his contemporary female readers found it unbearably misogynistic.[21] In fact, *Native Son* positions women as the most important audience within the text itself: Bigger's mother expects explanations of him, Mary asks him to respond to her, Mrs. Dalton (though blind) is the one "watching" when Bigger kills Mary, and Bessie becomes the single witness to Bigger's confession. Implicitly, then, the text figures women as an audience for the novel itself. We have

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already seen the way in which Bigger tries to use Max as an audience. He calls on him to participate in an interdependent performance that will give Bigger access to political speech, but Max is unable to respond. Audience here is of central political importance to the novel. Like the narrative relation between Janie and Pheoby in *Their Eyes,* the climactic interaction between Max and Bigger makes it clear that performing as audience is an active and necessary role for meaningful voice work to occur. In placing women in the role of audience, Wright may be moving away from radical representations of female voice work such as his character Aunt Sue, but he is still far from assigning women an entirely passive role.

If Max becomes the central figure representing the realm of political speech and its failure to hear Bigger, Bessie becomes the central figure representing a potential counterpublic audience that could. Max is the character Bigger asks to hear him, but Bessie is the character that actually provides a space in which Bigger can speak. Barbara Johnson has suggested that Bessie, reading Bigger's ransom note over his shoulder and guessing his guilt in the murder of Mary Dalton, stands in for the black woman reader "whose reading is both accurate and threatening" ("Re(a)d" 69). I would suggest that not only does Bessie turn herself into an accurate reader, but Bigger in fact asks her to be a reader and an audience to his texts. Ultimately, the possibility of her speech becomes too threatening for him, but before this scene of reading he looks to her as the sole audience who can hear and confirm his experience. After he murders Mary he wants to speak, "to stand up and shout, telling them that he had killed a rich white girl" (129), and in this state of mind the first thing he thinks to do is to go see Bessie. Here Bigger has a double audience in the same way that the book itself does. He has a white male audience, to whom he desires to speak but cannot. He also has a black female audience, to whom he can speak and who gives him something back in return: "he saw her looking at him, her black eyes wide with eager interest. . . .It made him feel alive and gave him a heightened sense of the value of himself" (143). Certainly women as a validating audience for men is not a radically feminist construction of the male/female relationship. At the same time, for a character like Bigger who is undoubtedly misogynistic and has almost no sources for any sense of self-worth, the power of Bessie's response to him is striking.

This same split in audience happens again when Bigger writes his ransom note to the Daltons. He explicitly addresses the letter to a white

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male reader (Mr. Dalton) and yet he needs Bessie as an audience for the note's creation. Bessie plants the idea of a letter in Bigger's head, which prompts his act of writing in the first place. Moreover, Bigger equates writing with Bessie's presence: "He should see Bessie tonight. And he ought to pick out the pencil and paper he would use" (164), the "and" suggesting not just a series of thoughts but an explicit link between Bessie and writing, almost as if he's picking out what to wear for a date. Bigger then proceeds to write the note in Bessie's presence. There is no good reason for this other than that Bigger needs or wants an audience, a second audience, a black female audience. Interestingly the one edit he makes to the letter is to change "if you want your daughter back safe" to "if you want your daughter back alive" (176-77). This appears at first as yet more evidence of Bigger's willingness to perpetuate violence, both physical and textual, against women. However, if we think of this scene of writing as a kind of parable for Wright's writing or African American writing in general, the fact that he "crossed out 'safe' and wrote 'alive'" can also be read as the politico-aesthetic philosophy behind the text. Just as Wright represents Sue as a heroine for giving up safety in exchange for a live and active politics, so here we might read the text written by a black man and witnessed by a black woman as a call to replace safety not with not being dead but with truly being *alive*.

One final note on Bessie, and again this is not to suggest that Bigger himself values her as he should, treats her as he should, or even considers her to be fully a human being, but rather to suggest that the text shows us her power as an audience for Bigger's desire to be known and heard—a potential but failed partner in voice work. The consensual sex scene between Bessie and Bigger is described in the following language:

> [He] slept in her body, rising and sinking with the ebb and flow of her blood, being willingly dragged into a warm night sea to rise renewed to the surface to face a world he hated and wanted to blot out of existence, clinging close to a fountain whose warm waters washed and cleaned his senses, cooled them, made them strong and keen again to see and smell and touch and taste and hear, cleared them to end the tiredness and to reforge in him a new sense of time and space;—after he had been tossed to dry upon a warm sunlit rock under a white sky he lifted his hand slowly and heavily and touched Bessie's lips with his fingers. (135)

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I have quoted this passage at some length in part to illustrate its lyricism, its near Romanticism in what has been agreed to be a highly Naturalist novel. This is not simply a representation of Bigger's response to getting off (which it is suggested he does in the theater without the accompaniment of this lyrical language). Something different is happening here. For Bigger to figure Bessie as the sea on which he rides, or as a figure of care or renewal does not challenge ingrained understandings and images of woman. However, the narrative suggests that her power here goes beyond attending to his physical desires. The language of this passage is transformative: "washed," "cleaned," "made strong," "cleared," "reforged," "new sense." Additionally, the natural imagery of rock and sun is repeated, if in a slightly less lyrical form, at the moment in the "Fate" section just after Max has first spoken to Bigger about the murders. Here Bigger begins to feel "a recognition of his life" and a "sense of the value of himself." "For the first time in his life," the narrative, focalized through Bigger, tells us, "he felt ground beneath his feet" (361). And on the following page an image forms in Bigger's head of "a strong blinding sun sending hot rays down and he was standing in the midst of a vast crowd of men, white men and black men and all men, and the sun's rays melted away the many differences, those colors, the clothes, and drew what was common and good upward toward the sun" (362). The reader will note that this is not the first image of Bigger feeling himself to be on solid ground. It was, in fact, in the afterglow of sex with Bessie. And this image of a sunny sky that could melt away differences is also prefigured in Bessie's lips, to which Bigger lifts his hand while feeling himself "upon a warm sunlit rock under a white sky." The narrative, then, complicates Bigger's sexist uses of Bessie, suggesting that—while he may not realize it in his drive for recognition in a white male public realm, and while his gestures to reach for her also silence her (his hand covers her mouth to touch her lips)—he has indeed had other chances for a sense of self-worth, self-understanding, and the warmth of a hope for a world where race and gender are not insurmountable differences between people.

While I am not arguing that we ignore the misogyny in *Native Son* or depreciate the differences between Wright's and Hurston's literary approaches, and while I certainly do not think that the readings that feminist and particularly black feminist theory have given us of these novels should be devalued, these readings have to some extent limited our ways of reading and hearing these texts, particularly in relation to one another.

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Reading Wright's and Hurston's aesthetic approaches to politics in the context of voice work in the early civil rights era can help us to read beyond what remain heavily gendered understandings of the racial politics of both authors. Wright and Hurston produced their texts at a historical moment when US public discourse was such that they both felt it useful and necessary not only to produce an African American literary voice but also to mark a lack, an absence of political voice. They both employ voice work in their texts to call on readers, particularly black female readers, to engage (violently if necessary) in a struggle to disrupt the power structures in place so that such a political voice might be able to emerge.

§

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Notes

1. William J. Maxwell makes a similar argument regarding the "vision of a Hurston/Wright divide" that "underwrites genealogies of audacious black women's writing burdened by Wright's male line but boldly, dialogically responsive to it" as well as "dramatiz[ing] less gendered oppositions undergirding the black modern within contemporary African American criticism, oppositions such as race versus class, modernism versus naturalism, Harlem Renaissance versus Chicago Renaissance, black nationalism versus Marxism, and so on" (155-56).

2. The importance of voice in African American fiction has been discussed by critics such as John F. Callahan, who discusses the "pursuit of voice" in African American fiction; Michael Awkward, who claims that "the dominant image" in black women's writing is "the struggle to make articulate a heretofore repressed and silenced black female's story and voice" (1); and Robert Stepto, who tells us that in slave narratives, "The voice is striking because of what it relates, but even more so because the slave's acquisition of voice is quite possibly his only permanent achievement once he escapes and casts himself upon a new and larger landscape" (3).

3. For more on speech act theory see J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* and John R. Searle's *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*.

4. Hurston and Wright were both concerned with the systems through which

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their state and society functioned. Wright spent many years organizing with the Communist party and Hurston notoriously objected to the government's legal enforcement of desegregation. This is not to suggest, then, that Hurston and Wright would have explicitly agreed with Rancière's definition of the political. However, both Hurston and Wright were ultimately not particularly confident in the power of either the US government or established political and social movements (communism, cultural nationalism, popular front, etc.) to speak to the state of American racism and racial violence. And both used their literary work to negotiate and critique the sites at which their confidence in state and social systems failed. Thus, Rancière's theorization can help us to read the politics of voice work at play in their respective texts, which functions to create the speaking subject or point to its lack rather than to speak to pre-existing political systems, ideologies, or disciplinary structures.

5. Though this term has come into relatively wide acceptance, I am following Nikhil Pal Singh's usage and definition specifically. Singh suggests that "black subaltern struggle, white resistance, and open and surreptitious racial discord" (12) defines a civil rights struggle that began much earlier than the legal codifications of the 1950s and continues to the present day. Though he does not give a specific date of origin, he begins his own study in the 1930s, suggesting this decade as the beginning of the long civil rights era.

6. Michael Denning's *The Cultural Front* (New York: Verso, 1997) and Barbara Foley's *Radical Representations* are two recent works that have helped define radical political writing in the pre-Cold War US. Both mention Hurston only in passing and both use her specifically as a foil to a longer more engaged reading of Wright. Though Foley has a chapter on "Women and the Left in the 1930s," she discusses no African American women and she categorizes most women's writing as consisting of "representations of identity and selfhood" (237). She acknowledges that these themes represent "the centrality of cultural change to the process of revolutionary transformation," but her decision to segregate this discussion implies that while issues of culture, identity, and selfhood are indirectly important to revolution, they are a secondary and particularly female-oriented area, not intimately connected to or overlapping with other "radical representations" (237). Additionally, Singh's insightful rethinking of the civil rights movement addresses very few women thinkers, writers, or activists, again implying that the persons central to the thinking of civil rights and black politics in the early to mid-twentieth century were men, and their subject matter publically and politically oriented.

7. Singh argues that our current understanding of the civil rights movement has been distorted by the ultimate success of strategies of "Cold War civil rights" that made significant legal gains against segregation, covering up the complex transnational and local movements that made up the long civil rights

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era. "By accepting a vision predicated on the subordination of racial equality to national security," Singh writes, "mainstream black civil rights leaders acquiesced to the state-sanctioned thinning of the field of robust and independent black public interaction that had been developing since the 1930s" (168). My rereading of Wright and Hurston is an attempt to uncover connections between their work, the vast criticism on it, and the complex and robust possibilities for black politics and political articulations being constructed in the era leading up to Cold War civil rights.

8. See for example, Martyn Bone's "The (Extended) South of Black Folk: Intraregional and Transnational Migrant Labor in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," which brings historical information on intrastate and regional migration in the South to a reading of *Their Eyes*; Leif Sorensen's "Modernity on a Global Stage: Hurston's Alternative Modernism," which reads *Their Eyes* in the context of Hurston's ethnographic productions and her experiences in the Caribbean; and Hildegard Hoeller's "Racial Currency: Zora Neale Hurston's 'The Gilded Six-Bits' and the Gold-Standard Debate," which reads "The Gilded Six-Bits" in the context of the gold standard debate and the relation between monetary and racial essentialism.

9. Exceptions to this are Leigh Anne Duck's "'Go there tuh *know* there': Zora Neale Hurston and the Chronotope of the Folk," which sees Hurston's critique of bourgeois white modernity as a critique of its patriarchal structures; and Sorensen's "Hurston's Alternative Modernism," which reads gender discrimination within Hurston's authentic ethnographic representations of folk culture as prompting the writing of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Nevertheless, both critics ultimately retain the public/private and ethnographic/fictional divides, reading *Their Eyes* as a feminist but private, less directly political, engagement of marginalized experiences of modernity.

10. See for example, Deborah G. Plant, *Every Tub Must Sit on Its Own Bottom*; M. Genevieve West, *Zora Neale Hurston & American Literary Culture*; and Stephen Spencer, "Racial Politics and the Literary Reception of Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*."

11. Gates refers to it as "the killing timbre of Janie's true inner voice," (190) and Callahan as, "the volcanic potential of women's voices" (134).

12. For more on Hurston's publishing history and her contemporary critical reception by African American critics see West's *Zora Neale Hurston & American Literary Culture*.

13. For reviews of criticism that positions Wright's fiction as misogynistic see Sondra Guttman's "What Bigger Killed For: Rereading Violence Against Women in *Native Son*," and Cheryl Higashida's "Aunt Sue's Children: Re-viewing the Gender(ed) Politics of Richard Wright's Radicalism."

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14. James Baldwin notes this connection in "Everybody's Protest Novel." Rather than appreciate this connection as a literary lineage that challenges dominant masculisit norms, Baldwin uses it to reinstate himself in the properly male black literary tradition of "revelation" and "truth," while exiling Wright not only to a white and therefore inauthentic position but moreover to a female position that can never reveal "truth" but is rather "the ostentatious parading of excessive and spurious emotion" (15).

15. John Lowe notes another narrative similarity between Stowe's and Wright's texts: "As in *Uncle Tom's Cabin, Uncle Tom's Children* presents a general pattern of disintegration, with each story beginning with a whole family and then proceeding to chart its destruction and dispersal through racism" (71).

16. These opening and closing chapters, "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow" and "Bright and Morning Star" were added in 1940, two years after the collection's original publication. This fact does not undermine their structural importance but rather suggests an acknowledgment on both Wright's and his editiors' parts that the addition of these stories would highlight elements of importance in the original stories.

17. James R. Giles notes that Sue in "Bright and Morning Star," "triumphs over the forces which have limited the characters in the first four stories" (266). And Cheryl Higashida sees "Bright and Morning Star" as "the culmination of radicalism" in *Uncle Tom's Children* and "a recognition of African American women's revolutionary energies" (410).

18. Higashida calls this Sue's "subversive minstrelsy" (417) a term I find useful as long as we consider it subversive in relation to both racial and gender expectations.

19. Higashida reads these aspects of Sue's character as an historical acknowledgment of the "radical black mother"—"a new heroine on the Left" (412) exemplified by the mothers of the Scottsboro boys. I find this a convincing reading but would suggest that even without the historical context of actual radical black mothers, we can see Wright's narrative construction itself as a "call to action" prompted by the "emergence of another state of radicalism yet to be written" (418).

20. I am not suggesting this was entirely Wright's conscious purpose in the creation of Bigger. Clearly Wright was himself threatened by the idea of a particular kind of female audience (rich, white "banker's daughters") as potentially undermining his authority as a black male writer. Nevertheless, this politics of address positions women as a desired audience in *Native Son*.

21. Women critics at the time of the novel's publication appear to have been less concerned about the violence against women in the text than later crit-

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ics of the 1970s and 1980s. The first extended critique that argues *Native Son* is misogynistic that I am aware of is Sylvia Keady's "Richard Wright's Women Characters and Inequality" (1976). This would indicate that second wave feminisms and their related effect on literary criticism were largely the source for reading Wright's representations of violence against women as indications of a misogynist text. Sondra Guttman argues that such readings have overlooked the ways in which representations of violence against women in *Native Son* critique the ways in which "women's bodies served as sites of conflict between men" (171). This article continues Guttman's work of challenging overly-simplistic readings of Wright's representations of violence against women; it also attempts to move away from reading gender in relation to direct representations of women's bodies (as objects) and to look for the way female subjectivity circulates through indirect narrative address.

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"Fictions Where a Man Could Live": Worldlessness, Utopia, and the Void in Rushdie's *Grimus*

Eric D. Smith

> From that day to this, I have thought of myself as a wholly secular person, and have been drawn towards the great traditions of secular radicalism—in politics, socialism; in the arts, modernism and its offspring—that have been the driving forces behind much of the history of the twentieth century. But perhaps I write, in part, to fill up that emptied God-chamber with other dreams. Because it is, after all, a room for dreaming in.
>
> —Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*

> Then, everything was possible. Now, nothing is.
>
> —*Grimus*

Read against the industry-inspiring success of his better-known works, Rushdie's debut novel *Grimus* (1975) is often regarded as the artistically tentative effort of the author who would, in his maturity, go on to write *Midnight's Children* (1981). The relative dearth of critical responses to *Grimus* in the thirty-five years since its publication seems to indicate a scholarly consensus, though one which, given the recently recognized emergence of the genre of postcolonial science fiction, invites renewed consideration. In the essay that follows, I resist this broadly dismissive

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critical approach by suggesting that the novel's appropriation of utopian and science fictional resources provides for both a critical/aesthetic intervention—among the very first—into the global order just making itself visible in the mid-1970s and, perhaps more important, for the utopian *neutralization* of that order. To reposition *Grimus* within the rich tradition of utopia/SF,[1] I argue, is to overcome the ideological limits of previous scholarly appraisals, restoring a properly historical context against which the novel's deep political and pedagogical tendencies—as well as its considerable aesthetic accomplishments—may be more fully understood.

A common justification for the critical neglect of *Grimus* is its apparent obliviousness to the disciplinary shibboleths of what was, throughout the 1980s, the developing field of postcolonial studies. From the vantage of the early 1990s institutionalization of the discipline, *Grimus* is not a successful novel because it is not yet an identifiably *postcolonial* one. Mujeebuddin Syed writes in 1994 that "in spite of its brilliant attempt at creating an ironic *meta-histoire*, a sardonic *philosophia perennis*, *Grimus* falters in its failure to countenance postcolonial concerns." Rushdie's Joycean narrative experiments, Syed further argues, "prove inadequate in providing *Grimus* with a mooring, an anchor that can provide its high profile a well-defined identity" (148). Similarly, Catherine Cundy suggests in 1992 that the true value of *Grimus* is simply that it "offers an important insight into the stylistic and thematic preoccupations developed more fully in the author's later work," thus allowing us to see in embryo the "areas of debate which are handled with greater depth and maturity in Rushdie's later work" (128). At this apprentice stage, she suggests, the thematic concerns that will inform subsequent novels (hybridity, the émigré experience, the quest for postcolonial identity, and the ambivalent cultural legacies of imperialism) appear as yet frustratingly inchoate: "the diversity remains just that; the elements insufficiently blended to make the novel appear a skillfully amalgamated whole." *Grimus* is, Cundy contends, "clearly a novel from a period when Rushdie had not yet achieved the synthesis of diverse cultural strands and narrative forms" (137), and it takes only "tentative steps towards an examination of post-coloniality," a subject that she describes as "submerged" in the novel's mercurial structure (129).[2]

But what if such readings judge Rushdie's debut novel according to the wrong criteria, by standards derived from the disciplinary habits of thought that his later work helped to instantiate? Indeed, these critical approaches consider *Grimus* in the light of both *Midnight's Children*

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and a poststructuralist-inflected postcolonial hermeneutic. If, however, we disregard this interpretive consensus and its fundamental narrative of authorial entelechy, we might read the novel's unapologetic rejection of a national-cultural habitus not as a failing—as a failure to situate the book's multiple dislocations within the ambit of the postcolonial nation state—but rather as the register of an altogether different creative aim.

At least one recent critical response to *Grimus* has taken important steps toward such a reconsideration and provides us a useful point of departure. In an essay tellingly titled "From Science Fiction to History," Andrew Teverson attempts to reclaim *Grimus* as a politically interested work of fiction by distinguishing between the thematic preoccupations of "science fiction"—expressed variously in its futuristic effects, its exposition of alternative causalities, and its "desire to postulate and explore the existence of parallel dimensions"—and the imaginative interventionism of the SF sub-genre "speculative fiction," the techniques of which, Teverson notes, "fulfill distinctive political aims" through the operation (though he does not use the term) of a Suvinian *cognitive estrangement* (112). In attempting to redeem Rushdie's underappreciated first novel, then, Teverson nevertheless rehearses many of the old academic prejudices against SF so frequently used to dismiss *Grimus* in the first place.[3] For instance, his observation that Rushdie does not regard SF "as an end in itself, however, but as a springboard for the exploration of philosophical and political concepts" tacitly assumes that SF "as an end in itself" (111) does not typically provide for such explorations without conceptual or critical supplementation. Such suppositions, I argue, both limit our capacity to read *Grimus* on its own terms and neglect the dialectical dynamism that is the hallmark of SF. Despite its many productive insights, then, Teverson's analysis is fundamentally hampered by its reluctance to countenance the novel's all-important generic affiliations.

Recognizing in the novel's "Conceptualist" philosophical system—by which the Gorfs "create" by simply reconfiguring the sequence of what already is—elements of a familiar post-structuralist epistemology, Teverson suggests that the novel might be read as a self-reflexive "covert analysis" of the limits of post-structuralism itself. The post-structuralist privileging of discourse as anterior to and thus constitutive of both the self and experiential reality is "only a whisper away from the Gorfic assertion that reality is constructed by thought forms and can be transformed by the anagrammatical rearrangement of these thought forms" (116). To this

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philosophic trend, which was by the mid-1970s rapidly becoming the dominant critical and philosophical discourse in the West, *Grimus* thus poses the central question: "if post-structuralist thought does describe reality as it is, what is that reality and what are its implications for the human condition?" Teverson's analysis here begins to uncover, I think, the primary formal and political contribution of *Grimus*—and perhaps a substantial reason for the book's neglect—though even he reads it as a literary experiment that remains too generalized and culturally incoherent to realize its greater ambitions: "the intellectual explorations conducted in this fiction remain abstract, because they are never explicitly connected to a coherent, identifiable, historical moment" (120).

Thus confronted with the same problem as previous commentators, Teverson offers the strategic compromise that *Grimus* distinguishes between two conflicting forms of post-structuralism, one that is politically enabling and one that is decidedly disabling. The differences between these can be most clearly perceived in the Gorf's Divine Game of Order and its important lesser branch, Conceptualism, which originates in a response to a "rare" philosophical pronouncement from the Gorfic leader Dota: "*I think, therefore it is*" (66). As Rushdie writes, "Dota had intended it to mean simply that nothing could exist without the presence of a cognitive intellect to perceive its existence." The heretical Gorf Koax cleverly "reversed this to postulate that anything of which such an intellect could conceive *must therefore exist*," after which he conceives into existence other dimensions (Endimions) populated with various forms of life, an unprecedented act that understandably unnerves his fellow Gorfs. For Teverson, working through the philosophical differences and political implications of these primary postulates is the central concern of the book. In the orthodox model of Dota, he claims, "we engage with an independently existing material world using the structures of thought and structures of narrative that we have available to us," whereas the more heterodox locution of Koax "represents a dangerous form of self-delusion, because it detaches human actions from a material reality, and so relieves human beings of the need for a responsibility to that reality" (120). The problem posed by the novel, Teverson rightly suggests, is clearly that of political agency in a postmodern world.

While Teverson's reading does much to illuminate previously overlooked dimensions of the book, both repositioning it as a politically engaged fiction and underscoring the importance of material history in

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our understanding of it, I recommend that we might also recognize in Koax's radical founding of Conceptualism the initial step in the novel's dialectical unfolding of a specifically utopianist figuration, one that takes place against the "worldless" backdrop of an emergent globalization, the acknowledgment of which restores for us the novel's "missing" cultural context and hermeneutic ground.

Prior to the heretical pronouncement of Koax, our narrator tells us, Gorfic reality consisted of a vacuum-like stasis in which the stony beings sat trapped in "near-immobility and total isolation" (65). Because they lacked a self-substantiating other, the Gorfs could scarcely even verify the presumed superiority of their own culture and so succumbed to a "philosophy of despair" summed up in another of the celebrated utterances of Dota: "*And are we actually to be the least intelligent race in our endimions?*" In a move that anticipates his subsequent major revision of the Divine Game of Order, Koax rejects the inherent pessimism of this worldview in an anagrammatical reformulation of the question: "*Determine how catalytic an elite is; use our talent and learning-lobe.*" This response, our narrator observes, is

> a perfect use of Anagrammar; for not only does it contain all the letters of the Chiefest Question and only those letters, but moreover, it enriches the Question itself, adding to it the concept of elitism and its desirability, the concept of catalysis and its origins, and instructions about how the question should be answered.

That is, Koax's response, while admitting nothing materially extrinsic to the given framework of the original, nonetheless allows, in true dialectical fashion, for the faint recognition of a potentially contradictory impulse within it.

Perhaps even more useful here is the concept that contemporary French philosopher Alain Badiou calls the *void*, the indiscernible excess that "inexists" in the field of the known as the "non-term of any totality" (*Being* 55). Badiou contends that any situation or field of knowledge also contains within it the not-yet-known, that which can figure into the existing structure only as the unaccountable or impossible. He notes, for instance, that for the ancient Greek Pythagoreans, the numerable domain was composed solely of whole, rational numbers. The discovery that the diagonal of a square to its side is a number neither whole nor rational therefore presents a particularly vexing aporia, especially given that Py-

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thagorean ontology is built on the premise that *being* is consonant with *number* (Badiou, *Theory* 202-23). The paradoxical existence of that which is not number within the ontological realm of number figures a void, or that which exceeds the existing symbolic order and therefore provides an alternate perspective on the present situation, now revealed as contingent and unfinalized, even as it beckons toward an as yet unsymbolizable future configuration. For Badiou, the unnamable nature of the void has specifically political implications because the emergence of the politically agential subject can occur only, as Oliver Feltham glosses it, "through an act of nomination that baptizes the point of impossibility in a structure and forces the latter to accommodate it" (55). The properly political subject is thus the *excess of the existent order,* the uncompromising and impossible demands of which at once rend the fabric of the social totality and clear space for the production of a new one.[4] This is Badiou's (early, Maoist-inflected) version of the *historical* dialectic, a structure, I believe, also very much at work within the narrative composition of *Grimus*.[5]

Calf Island, Anagrammar, and the return of the subject

We can first observe the utopian operation of the void in *Grimus* as a philosophical dilemma borne out of the construction of the novel's primary setting, the chronotopically circumscribed, explicitly "utopian" space of Calf Island. Following his rogue act of Conceptualization, Koax reassures his grousing fellow Gorfs by conceiving an Object for each new Endimions that allows its possessor to control access to all other Endimions, a kind of networking system that secures the authority of the Gorfs over their creations. The Object created for Earth, fortuitously discovered by Virgil the gravedigger, is the Stone Rose, contact with which allows Virgil and his later associates Deggle and Grimus to discover the secrets of trans-dimensional "travelling," obtain the elixirs of eternal life and death, and ultimately construct and populate Calf Island, a haven where those "who tire of the world but not of life" may spend eternity indulging their respective intellectual and physical passions (211).

Serving as the Dantean guide to protagonist Flapping Eagle—who is on a quest to find the now tyrannical Grimus and to rescue his lost sister—Virgil disagrees with Grimus, his erstwhile partner, on the crucial

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philosophical nature of Calf Island's creation. As Virgil notes in his journal: "We have been building a world. Impossible to say whether we *found* the island or *made* it. I incline to the latter, Grimus to the former. He holds that Conceptual Technology merely reveals existences which mirror your concepts. I am not so sure" (211). Grimus's view, that is, corresponds to the orthodox one delineated by the Gorfic law of Anagrammar, which, until the dramatic reformulation authored by Koax, limited the act of creation to the meager reshuffling of an already existent content. Conversely, Virgil allows for the radical act of creation *ex nihilo,* for the emergence of the pre-theoretical or pre-conceptual, that which has not yet, in Lacanian argot, been inscribed into the Symbolic order but rather bursts upon it as a traumatic irruption of the unsymbolizable Real. Badiou offers us a useful concept here as well, for Koax's revolutionary revision of the divine law of Anagrammar, as progressive as it seems in its immediate context, bears a striking resemblance to what Badiou criticizes as the "structural dialectic," which, through an overly deterministic theory of transformation that privileges the immobilizing circular symmetry of the dissolution of opposites, disallows both contingency and novelty and limits the process of (periodizing, historical) change to local modification rather than systemic transformation (*Theory* 54). Such a mechanistic/formalistic model collapses the evental void of the situation that marks the site of the subject and thus of authentic political agency. Structural dialecticism, which Badiou comes to associate primarily with the thought of his mentor Althusser,[6] serves only as a way station in the more comprehensively dialectical trajectory (the historical) charted by Badiou's ongoing project and, I want to suggest, Rushdie's first work of fiction. So while Koax's revision is a necessary first step, the novel cannot allow it to be the last.

In what is perhaps the most thorough critical treatment of *Grimus* to date, Roger Y. Clark reads the novel's self-conscious appropriation of various cyclical cosmologies as an index of its poststructuralist sympathies, of its presumed repudiation of the linear and dichotomous in favor of the circular and the plural. Flapping Eagle, whose birth name is Born-From-Dead due to his mother's expiration during childbirth, completes the cycles of his life and of the universe, symbolically returning the latter to a state of cosmic nullity out of which the next age can rise and likewise decline. Thus, according to Clark's interpretation, the novel rehearses a characteristically postmodernist cynicism with regard to emancipatory grand narratives: "Thinking in terms of the *Divine Comedy,* one might

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see Eagle's fate as a return from the light-filled realms of Heaven to the obscure forest of this world" (60). For Clark, Rushdie's patchwork interpolation of global mythologies simply reinforces the dominant motif of an inescapably recurrent historical cycle:

> Keeping in mind Attar's Qaf, one might note that Attar's pilgrim returns to the mundane world after his union and annihilation. Given the Hindu references in the text, one might conclude that Eagle remains on the wheel of death and rebirth, and that after his heavenly experience with Media he will proceed to a less exalted state of being. This fits with the references to Germanic myth as well, for the afterlife of Gimle is not nearly as exciting as the heroic battles and the eschatological chaos which precede it. (60)

Yet, what if this cyclical worldview, as perfectly consonant with the nonlinear, perpetual present of postmodernity (and the structural dialectic) as with the Gorfic doctrine of Anagrammar, is precisely what *Grimus* undertakes to challenge? Applying Badiou's concept of the void, we can determine that the governing structure of the novel is not that of the cycle but rather that of the spiral. As Ernst Bloch reminds us, the cycle, which flatly refuses the radical alterity of the novum, and in which "the Last thing appears simply as the attained return of an already completed First Thing which has been lost or relinquished" (203) is a favored trope of conservative, pseudo-utopian discourse. Conversely, Flapping Eagle's journey to (and beyond) the stronghold of Grimus is punctuated by a series of transgressions and traversals of the dominant structure that Badiou might recognize as the spiraling arc of a truly *political* subject, which, as he writes, "stands at the crossing between a lack of being and a destruction, a repetition and an interruption, a placement, and an excess" (*Theory* 139). By positing and then pointedly violating a series of "absolute" horizons, the novel establishes a dialectical pattern that grows increasingly more elaborate as the narrative unfolds and as Flapping Eagle approaches the object of his quest.

To begin his journey, Eagle wrenches himself free of the exclusive and static order of the Axona and attains a consciousness of the present *as present*. The opening of chapter two introduces us by way of flashback[7] to the young Eagle as he drowses in the effectively timeless enclosure of the Axona: "The day had begun well enough. That is to say, it resembled the previous day sufficiently (in terms of weather, temperature and mood)

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to give the half-sleeping young man the illusion of continuity" (16). This sense of continuity is tempered by just enough superficial variation "to produce an equal and opposite illusion of temporal movement." Flapping Eagle basks "pleasurably in these conflicting and harmonious mirages, drifting slowly up towards consciousness, which would banish both and substitute a third illusion: the present." The seeming whole of the present is therefore unmasked by the narrator as a conflict of oppositional tendencies (difference emerging here out of repetition), and Eagle's fleeting meditation on this constitutive contradiction signals the emergence of a discerning historical consciousness, one which will eventually lead him to violate the foremost Axona prohibition: "to be a race apart and have no doings with the wicked world."

In fact, Flapping Eagle himself *embodies* the indiscernible within the Axona community. While the troubling circumstance of his birth from his mother's dead body marks him as ill-omened and his indefinite sex as a child proves an irreducible complication for the Axona's binary gender categories, it is his pigment that ultimately alienates Eagle from his tribe. A dark-skinned people who have never before encountered outsiders, the Axona can interpret Eagle's whiteness only as a horrifying sign of his absolute difference, the acceptance of which would require the utter dismantling of the Axona doctrine of homogeneity. This early exclusion prepares him, he later admits, for his long journey to Calf Island, the first step of which is a willful transgression of the obsessively guarded Axona border. Thus, when the Whirling Demons who, according to Axona legend, both defend and define the tribal boundary are exposed as "nothing but air" (or ideology), what Eagle previously perceived as an absolute limit is revealed as merely the first in a series of barriers to be overcome (21).[8] It is not then surprising that the first stop on his journey is the city of *Phoenix*, the significance of which would seem to validate the cyclical reading offered by Clark except that we are given no return here but instead the passing of yet another horizon, the forcing open of another asphyxiating circuit into a new space.

Eventually, after many years of travel, the outer boundaries of the world itself become confining and Eagle imagines himself into the dimension of Calf Island through an impossible hole in the sea. Even on the island, however, he is confronted with complex strata of supposedly unbreachable boundaries. Virgil and Dolores occupy the lowest such stratum of Calf Island along the coastline, where they have come to escape the

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steadily spreading Grimus Effect, a kind of debilitating hyper-awareness of both the existing and potential inner and outer dimensions, a condition that can result in mental derangement or even death.

Higher up on the forbidding slopes of the mountain is the island's single settlement of K. To approach K, Eagle must overcome the paralyzing delirium of the Grimus Effect, and his efforts to do so both indicate the novel's critical engagement with poststructuralism and an incipient postmodernity at the same time that they reveal the utopianism inherent to Virgil's guiding philosophy. In explaining the novel properties of interdimensionality, Virgil notes that Eagle must cultivate "a different set of tools of perception," that he must come to the recognition that "the limitations we place upon the world are imposed by ourselves rather than the world" (52). Apart from its basic philosophical idealism, inherent in such recognition is the perception of the myriad potential realities present within the visible limits of the actual:

> Is it not a conceptual possibility that here, in our midst, permeating all of us and all that surrounds us, is a completely other world, composed of different kinds of solids, different kinds of empty spaces, with different perceptual tools, which make us as non-existent to its inhabitants as they are to ours? In a word, another dimension. . . .If you concede that conceptual possibility, said Mr. Jones, you must also concede that there may well be more than one. In fact, that an infinity of dimensions might exist, as palimpsests, upon and within and around our own, without our being in any wise able to perceive them.

Eagle's arrival on Calf Island, one of these "million possible Earths with a million possible histories," signals his special receptivity to such unseen possibilities, a characteristic that, even as it reveals the existence of the Calf Island Endimions also renders him acutely vulnerable to the disorientations of the Grimus Effect and its accompanying "dimension-fever."

Virgil recognizes in Eagle's unique sensitivity, however, the essential utopian characteristic of unfinishedness, or what Bloch calls the "prospective horizon" (223), the critical vantage of which incompletes the inert structure of the present and disturbs its isotropic vectors. As Virgil informs the young hero, "Mr. Eagle, you are not a realized man. That is your weakness and also your power" (70). It is, we learn, only their relative "completion" that insulates the inhabitants of K from the maddening Effect even

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as it renders them incapable (indeed, because it renders them incapable) of resisting the quiet tyranny of Grimus, who resides on the mountain's peak behind an impenetrable "wall of cloud" that "never lifts" (100–1). "Where the prospective horizon is omitted," writes Bloch, "reality only appears as become, as dead, and it is the dead . . . who are burying their dead here" (223); it is not surprising that we find a strikingly Blochean formulation in Grimus: "That which is complete is also dead" (232). Inclusion of the prospective horizon within the reckoning of reality, Bloch writes, reveals the "path-network of dialectical processes which occur in an unfinished world, in a world which would not be in the least changeable without the enormous future: real possibility in that world" (223). Eagle's fraught journey into K may therefore be read as nothing short of the return of the dialectic itself.

Mounting the slopes of Calf Mountain with Virgil as guide, Eagle is suddenly overcome with dimension-fever, significantly described here as a "temporary loss of imagination," and faces his next major challenge in the form of the Abyssinian twins Mallit and Khallit, who are engaged in an argument "without beginning or end, its very lack of purpose or decision undermining Flapping Eagle's ability to think clearly" (77). The mystifying closed circuit of this interminable debate, in which the twin interlocutors exchange positions and perfectly rebut one another, creates yet another airless enclosure, an absolute limit and seemingly insuperable deadlock. As Clark describes it, the twins "throw irreconcilable opposites at Eagle and then make his survival depend upon reconciling them" (47). In so doing, Mallit and Khallit rehearse the defining conflict of Flapping Eagle's existence as well as the formal preoccupations of the novel: "But here's a paradox, said Khallit. Suppose a man deprived of death. Suppose him wandering through all eternity, a beginning without an end. Does the absence of death in him mean that life is also absent?" (78). Thus, they determine, Flapping Eagle is one of the living dead, "Incapable of influencing his own life" and utterly without purpose. But for the timely intervention of Virgil, whose whirling "Weakdance" dissolves the conceptual doublebind, Eagle would certainly have succumbed to the ensnaring and enervating logic of this most postmodern of puzzles, the effectiveness of which derives from a simple paucity of imagination, from Eagle's inability to deny the intolerable terms given him and to choose the seemingly impossible option. After he is rescued and reflects on the anagrammatical rationale of the Mallit/Khallit puzzle, Eagle realizes that

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the way out, based on a pun told him by the trickster figure Deggle many years earlier, was before him all the time: "Ethiopia . . . Abyssinia . . . I'll be seeing you. . . . Goodbye. All he had to do was say Goodbye and the puzzle was solved" (79). In other words, confronted with the absolute foreclusion of agency, all he need do is assert it.

Flapping Eagle's passion for the real

Upon finally arriving in K, Flapping Eagle is obligated by the Doctrine of Obsession to declare a specific personal interest. Under the instruction of resident philosopher Ignatius Quasimodo Gribb, "the petrified, Simplified Men of K" (199), whose collectivity is defined by national-cultural plurality as much as by the unifying absence of Grimus, have devoted themselves single-mindedly to the objects of their respective personal "obsessions," which, as Virgil notes, "close the mind to dimensions" and their array of implied social alternatives: "Often [the people of K] fix themselves a time in their lives to mull over. Live the same day over and over again. . . . Still. If a false front's thick enough, it serves. To protect" (82). As he is told by one of the inhabitants, "We in K . . . like to think of ourselves as complete men. Most, or actually all of us have a special area of interest to call our own. I don't think we could accept anyone otherwise" (123). The paralyzing inertia of K (as well as the utopian agenda of the novel) is most clearly and poignantly epitomized by the arrested pregnancy of Irina Cherkassov, who, after drinking the blue elixir of eternal life and retiring to Calf Island, discovered that she was with child: "Can you understand, Flapping Eagle, how that feels? What it is to have a second life stagnant within one's womb, perhaps a genius, perhaps a second idiot, perhaps a monster, as frozen within me as the lovers on the grecian urn?" (146). I. Q. Gribb's personal obsession of choice, the cliché, likewise reinforces the circular (and circumscriptive) logic that characterizes the town of K, its foreclusion of invention: "This, said Gribb, jabbing a finger at the pages, is my great endeavour. The All-Purpose Quotable Philosophy. A quote for all seasons to make life both supportable and comprehensible. A framework of phrases to live within, pregnant with a truly universal meaning" (129).

While this obsessionalism and lack of historical consciousness is conspicuously concentrated in the settlement of K, it defines more broadly the postmodern reality of Calf Island as a whole. Before the catalyzing

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advent of Eagle as the island's unassimilable surplus, Virgil, along with his lover Dolores, had succumbed completely to the torpor and absolute relativism of the island's perpetual present: "We live wholly in the microcosm, you see; the state of my corns and the state of nations are to me of equal concern. I don't want to preach but I would recommend that you adapt yourself to minutiae; they are so much less confusing" (44). Virgil's worldview rehearses here almost exactly Fredric Jameson's observation that the ideally schizophrenic postmodern subject is "easy enough to please, provided only an eternal present is thrust before the eyes, which gaze with equal fascination on an old shoe or on the tenaciously growing organic mystery of the human toenail" (*Postmodernism* 10). As Virgil goes on to counsel, "Concentrate on the *here*, Mr. Eagle, that's my advice to you. . . . Don't worry about the *there*. Or the Past. Or the Future. Worry about dinner and your corns. Those are things you can affect" (44).

It is Eagle's threat to this perpetual present that most troubles Dolores, who keeps history safely contained in a locked trunk that is never opened:

> Sure, sure, sure, as fixed in the fluid of the years as her immortal body, immortal now as souls, replenished daily, neither growing old nor young, static. The present is tomorrow's past, as fixed, as sure, the trunk would tell her so. . . . There, the past. Put him in the trunk, dear gravedigger poet, put him there to stay unaltered, put him in the trunk and keep him, folded, enfolded, the same for ever and ever, world without end, our men. (57)

Dolores' fears prove justified in that Flapping Eagle's arrival almost immediately rouses Virgil both to recall the history of the island and to risk what he later describes as "a return to a long-lost war" (101), thereby abandoning the crippling and ahistorical monotony of his life on the shore with Dolores, who subsequently loses what is left of her tenuous mental equilibrium and commits suicide, the first of several deaths on this island of eternal life.

To the astonishment of everyone in K, Eagle declares his obsession to be Grimus himself, the absent center (or Real) of Calf Island's existence. This choice is particularly disturbing to Gribb, who understands that the pluralistic, individualistic society of K depends for its structural integrity on the amnesiac suppression of the very force that subtends it. The people of K, rapt by the euphoria of their individual obsessions, have so successfully forgotten the existence of Grimus that he has become *myth*, his disavowed phantasmic presence concealed as much by the perceptual limits

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of cognitive specialization as by the invisible wall of his sub-dimension. In a structural analogue to the anagrammatical snare of Mallit/Khallit, Flapping Eagle must then search for the symptoms that reveal Grimus's presence while resisting the powerful temptation to succumb to the comforting oblivion of K's perpetual here-and-now.

Eagle's task thus exhibits striking parallels to the "impossible" operation of ideology critique within the smooth space of postmodernity, where reification has pierced every dimension, where no uncolonized locus remains from which to mount a proper critique, and where ideology as such is believed no longer to exist. Noting this crisis in his seminal discussion of postmodernism, Jameson writes that with the collapsing of a "minimal aesthetic distance" and the lost "possibility of the positioning of the cultural act outside the massive Being of capital, from which to assault this last," we face an unprecedented historical situation in which "some of our most cherished and time-honored radical conceptions about the nature of cultural politics may . . . find themselves outmoded" (*Postmodernism* 48). The limitations of the traditional leftist critique, the perceptual apparatuses of which are no longer commensurate to the enormity and plasticity of late capital and its penetration of the formerly extrinsic spheres of nature, culture, and the unconscious, are revealed (almost a decade before the appearance of Jameson's essay in 1984) in the character of Rushdie's P. S. Moonshy, whose Marxist burlesque functions not as an absolute dismissal of the leftist critique but rather as a critical dramatization of the insufficiency of the structural model (Marxism as a "science of history") to address the as yet untheorized problematic of late or globalized capital. In fact, the amnesiac settlement of K is itself founded upon a nostalgic preservation of the former model of imperialist/monopoly capitalism and its structural preference for the nation state: "To be in K was to return to a consciousness of history, of good times, even of nationhood. O'Toole, Cherkassov . . . like them or not, the names conjured a past world back to life" (130). But as Eagle's quest reveals, this reality is already obsolete, its old certainties and "structures of feeling" secured only by the absent center of Grimus, who later makes explicit his immanently *material* relationship to the fantasy-space of the island: "And who do you think it is that watches over K? Do you not think those aged houses would have fallen down by now? Do you not think that much-tilled soil would be exhausted by now? Did you ever wonder why Mr. Gribb never ran out of paper or where the metal hinges which held the doors on were made?" (237).

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Grimus thus reveals itself as an allegory not of postcolonial national or cultural identity but of the perceived decline of the statist problematic and the rise of what would gradually reveal itself as the new global order. The structural crises of the capitalist system in the late 1960s and early 1970s, characterized by precipitous global stagflation, the waning influence of the Bretton Woods regulations, and the ultimate abandonment of the Keynesian compromise between labor and capital, led finally to the rise of the neo-liberal policies and institutions that, by the late 1970s and early 1980s, had achieved full consolidation as the new economic dispensation. From Nixon's abandonment of the gold standard in 1971 to the conclusion of the last imperialist war in 1974[9] to Milton Friedman's Nobel Prize for economics in 1976, the 1970s saw the end of the old order and a seismic shift in global economic practice that would establish the foundations of the transnationalist capitalism we now call globalization. In Calf Island's orientation toward an outmoded political and economic model, *Grimus* offers both a pre-conceptual mapping of this new reality—taking shape at the very instant of the novel's composition—as well as a necessarily critical engagement with forms of resistance now rendered structurally obsolete.

In his perfunctory protests against the island's aristocratic Cherkassov family, therefore, the limits of Moonshy's resistance are thrown into pathetic relief, as are the ways in which his resistance is itself both complicit in and determined by the encompassing system by which this older antagonism has been subsumed. As Badiou notes, what eludes those Marxists who, like Moonshy, honor the ineluctable laws of "bourgeois society" and the "science of history," is the fact that the politicized "proletarian society" for which they wait is determined by the inert structural whole of bourgeois society itself as its internal and sustaining contradiction (*Theory* 30). This dialectical perspective ultimately dissolves its "weak" constitutive contradiction and favors/anticipates the return of the Whole. This, Badiou writes, is a "dialectical materiality without leverage" because it cancels the force of the contradiction and, in its renewing plenitude, forecloses the radical possibilities of the void. We must, Badiou insists, "dialecticize the structural dialectic beyond itself" (96).

Nonetheless, Eagle is inevitably drawn to Moonshy because he is the only inhabitant of K to doubt openly Gribb's blithe assurance that Grimus does not exist. As Moonshy observes during a characteristic pantomime of slogan-wielding protest in which he declares (presumably not for the

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first time) his impossible departure from Calf Island, "It is your ideas, Mr. Gribb, that are chiefly responsible for our bondage" (142). Moonshy's "faith" in an invisible oppressor is quickly dismissed by Gribb, who notes that he'd always understood the Marxist position to be that it was "superstition that was supposed to provide the opiate of the masses." This exchange is especially remarkable in its anticipation of the work of recent thinkers from the left like Žižek and Badiou, both of whom in fact reclaim the radical structure (if not the substance) of Pauline Christianity as a way to counter the postmodern condition of fragmentary contingency.[10] It is significant then that Eagle's sympathies, revealed here by way of interior monologue, clearly lie with Moonshy's conspiratorial suspicions: "*Unless the superstitions are grounded in fact. In which case, to deny them would indeed be a form of bondage*" (142). Thus, following a final discouraging exchange with Gribb in which the diminutive collector of clichés rehearses the standard postmodern prohibition against origins ("origins, beginnings, are valueless. Valueless. Study how we live, by all means. But leave, for goodness' sake, this womb-obsession of yours, this inquiry into birth" [148]), Eagle seeks out Moonshy, who "has struck [him] as a man worth talking to, if only because he had questioned the sovereignty of Gribb's ideas" (150). However, upon visiting his home and observing the fading placards on Moonshy's walls, "screaming defiance at long-gone tyrannies," Eagle comes to the crucial realization that Moonshy "differed from the rest only in his choice of obsession," that his predictable challenges to the system were, first, challenges to an already superseded system, and, second, already assimilated within the routine operation of the existing one. As Eagle observes of Moonshy's presumably endless deferral of revolutionary action, "He was secure in his attitudes, as he would never have to carry them to their logical conclusion."

Awaiting the evolutionary politicization of K's inhabitants, Moonshy's complacency recalls Žižek's reformulation of Lacan's knave/fool opposition. The knave, which Lacan defines as the "conformist who considers the mere existence of the given order as an argument for it," could formerly be identified with the conviction of the traditional Right that there could be no viable alternative to the free market (Žižek, "Holding" 324-25). On the other hand, the traditional Leftist (Moonshy) assumes the role of the fool, who, while exposing the limitations and contradictions of the existent order, "suspends the performative efficiency of his speech" (325). In the moment of postmodernity, however, Žižek contends that we

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must view these traditional roles as having been complicated if not wholly inverted: the "radicalism" of the postmodernist Left (for Žižek here, manifest in the work of Laclau and Butler) results in a "cynical resignation" to the unalterable fact of global capital, while the Right assumes a "more attractive" Pascalian commitment that simultaneously reveals the essential hidden mechanisms of the system. The way out of this crippling impasse, Žižek argues, is for the postmodern Leftist knave to reject the pseudo-activity of a merely revisionist hegemonic struggle within the horizon of the present system and to "*hold this utopian place of the global alternative open*, even if it remains empty, living on borrowed time, awaiting the content to fill it in." If Moonshy's traditional Leftist position of the fool is insufficient to address the situation of an emergent globalization, so too is the knavist strategy of the postmodern Left. Once more, Eagle must resolve an impossible deadlock and manifest what Badiou might characterize as the lack of that which is lacking, the dialectical exposure and abolition of the disavowed founding exclusion (Grimus himself) upon which rests the existent order.

Thus, while Teverson recognizes the way in which the "logic of the novel seems to reflect the charge leveled against postmodernism and post-structuralism" (118) by thinkers like Jameson and Aijaz Ahmad (the two he cites), allowing for a reading in which a totalizing political agency is not wholly abandoned, by framing Eagle's activity as a form of "good" postructuralism, he nevertheless reduces Eagle's disappointing encounter with Moonshy to a recapitulation of what he implicitly identifies as the novel's ultimate thematic imperative, the futility of resistance:

> Eagle believes that he is acting according to his own free will. When he reaches Grimus's home, however, it is revealed to him that his entire adventure, from the moment he left home to his confrontation with Grimus, has been plotted by the magician. Even his revolutionary desire to destroy Grimus and liberate the people of Calf Island, Flapping Eagle discovers, is part of Grimus's plan to complete the mythic structure of his life by making Flapping Eagle his "death." Flapping Eagle's act of resistance is, thus, like Moonshy's, because it becomes nothing more than a confirmation of Grimus's absolutist agendas.

We can identify this tendency in many postmodern SF narratives of the West, including the *Matrix* trilogy, in which the revolutionary promise

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with which the first film concludes is betrayed by the realization in the two sequels that Neo's resistance is perhaps a function of the system's routine self-maintenance, reducing "revolution" to merely cyclical "revolutions." It is precisely at this point of what appears to be a purely negative dialecticism, however, that a reconsideration of the book's generic link to utopia/SF can offer an alternative perspective on the seemingly forlorn conclusion of *Grimus*. To this end, I suggest that the lesson Eagle learns from his encounter with Moonshy—that the terrain has fundamentally shifted—is indispensable for our understanding of Eagle's final, heroic act.

Space, subsumption, neutralization

After visiting Virgil's ex-wife Liv[11] and enduring the requisite sexual humiliation (Liv's indirect vengeance on Grimus for a previous slight), Eagle receives a startling invitation to the otherwise inaccessible fortress of Grimushome itself:

> The house was wildly irregular, its walls anything but straight, no corner at a right angle, but it was a designed eccentricity, a deliberate folly. The zigzag patterns it wove on the mountaintop were purposeful, reflections of their creator.
>
> Reflections: the house gave them off in all directions, for every window in its wandering walls was also a mirror. This combination of undulating stone and blind, gleaming windows made the house curiously difficult to focus upon, as if his eyes refused to accept it, as if it was an illusion that would not harden into fact. (224)

This incredible description recalls *avant la lettre* postmodern architecture's much-discussed production of hyperspace, the structural bewilderments of which impose a disjuncture between the individual and her (social or natural) environment. Like the reflective "glass skin" discussed in Jameson's famous account of the Bonaventure Hotel, the exterior of Grimushome also "achieves a peculiar and placeless dissociation" from its surroundings, making it impossible to fix one's gaze on the physical contours of the building, reflecting instead "only the distorted images of everything that surrounds it" (*Postmodernism* 42). As Jameson observes, this disconnection "itself stands as the symbol and analogon of that even sharper dilemma which is the incapacity of our minds . . . to map the great multinational

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and decentered communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects" in the cultural moment of late capital (44). In the architectonic complexities of Grimushome, Eagle confronts physically the "deliberate folly" of an emergent globalization's disjunctive spatial logic and reveals the novel's tendency toward a critical cognitive mapping of postmodern space itself. Thus, when Grimus reveals to him the Rose Room at the hidden geometric center of Grimushome, Eagle observes of the structure's obfuscating design, "So that was why the house was such a crazy shape. Its labyrinthine excesses fogged the brain to such an extent that the presence of this small room went completely unnoticed" (241).

The novel's *mise en scene* is here again revealed to be the nexus of space, ideology, and resistance. Just as he has violated the inviolable taboos of his Axona home and ventured beyond the whirling demons to the ends of the earth only to pass beyond even that absolute boundary, just as he has entered the invisible fortress of Calf Island's non-existent oppressor, Eagle makes his way past the mystifying veils of Grimushome to the totemic source of Grimus's power, the object that represents both the island's link to myriad potential dimensions and its assimilation within the multidimensional dominion of the Gorfs: the Stone Rose.

Naturally, Eagle's first impulse is to destroy the object that has generated so much grief, a course of action not without considerable risk, as Virgil forewarns: "It is possible that this dimension cannot survive without the Rose. What is certain is that no-one will survive here, except for spiders, flies and animals, unless the Rose is broken. So it is a risk we must take" (191). Led to the secret chamber of the Rose, Eagle announces his intent to destroy it, to which Grimus responds with a curious final plea: "I foresaw I would have great difficulty in getting you to see my point of view, he said. It was for this reason that I conceptualized the Subsumer. If you take the other handle, we can communicate telepathically. Through the medium of this sphere" (242). Grasping the handle of the device, Eagle's mind is immediately penetrated by the invading consciousness of Grimus. As their psyches inextricably combine, his last coherent thought is of Grimus's smug words: "*My old mother always told me you've got to trick people into accepting new ideas.*"

More important than the mere recognition of ideological manipulation, though, is the precise form that Grimus's maneuver assumes. Closely following Eagle's disillusionment with Moonshy's obsolescent model of the gradual politicization of the proletariat, the violent sublation of his

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mind by Grimus's machine explicitly anticipates the recent resurgence of interest in Marx's theory of *subsumption*. Describing the process by which capital internalizes that which is exterior or autonomous, Marx distinguishes between *formal* and *real* subsumption. The former he designates as the requisite expansion of capitalist markets and the incorporation of the means of production outlying capital's immediate reach. The latter, however, marks what Hardt and Negri characterize as an "intensive" rather than "expansive" integration of labor such that capital folds in on itself and thoroughly penetrates and transforms its own relations of production (255). Comparing Foucault's account of the passage from the society of discipline to that of control to Marx's theory of subsumption, Hardt and Negri note that the radical internalizing force of real subsumption incorporates "not only the economic or only the cultural dimension of society but rather the social *bios* itself" (25). By reconfiguring the "linear and totalitarian figure of capitalist development," the real subsumption of globalization/postmodernity sees the full absorption of global society in the transition from imperialism to Empire and the consequent relocation of resistance from the former margins of the centralized power structure to the "thousand plateaus" of its now thoroughly deterritorialized network. Simply put, under postmodernity, Hardt and Negri claim, "there is no more outside" (186). And this is the crucial (and, for some, controversial) point for Hardt and Negri's theorization of a "postmodern" political agency: real subsumption is not the victorious culmination of the internalizing processes begun by an earlier formal subsumption; rather, formal subsumption itself creates the conditions of emancipatory struggle, in the form of class consciousness, which its disciplinary practices and institutions then prove insufficient to contain. The emergence of real subsumption is thus a consequential—and necessarily defensive—response to the new desiring subjectivities brought about by the processes of formal subsumption. Moonshy's resistance, therefore, is no longer effective because he continues to misdirect his political ire at the conscriptive forces "out there," because, unlike Eagle, he fails to recognize that the system has no exterior. Thus, after his consciousness is subsumed by Grimus, Eagle can no longer distinguish between himself and his foe; he has become the very thing he opposed and faces the last and most insuperable boundary, the suffocating closed circuit of the structural dialectic in which the apparently oppositional forces of Eagle and Grimus are reunited in a synthetic whole.

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This impasse brings us to the novel's ostensibly cynical conclusion. In the final confrontation with his adversarial double (just prior to his revealing of the Subsumer), Grimus details for Eagle the impossibility of resistance: "Since you do not know how to conceptualize the coordinates of your Dimension, you cannot leave the island. . . .You cannot stay among the Kaf's inhabitants, bearing my face. Your only alternative is suicide, and once I have shown you my marvels you will not wish to do so" (233). In an explicit rehearsal of the cyclical motif identified by Clark, Grimus reveals that Eagle has been carefully selected and groomed as his replacement as ruler of Calf Island and keeper of the Stone Rose: "It is both psychologically and symbolically satisfying. The period of stability containing within itself the seeds of its own downfall. The cataclysm being followed by a new and very similar order. It is aesthetic. It is right" (240). Free will, Grimus goes on to say, is illusory. One's behavior is governed by a limited number of flux lines suggestive of a finite number of potential actions, all of which Grimus has anticipated through the power of the Rose (239).

Eagle's response to these revelations is notable not simply for its obvious posture of defiance, but for the particular manner in which it rejects the delimitations of Grimus's forced choice: "But in the end it all depends on me, Grimus, in some way which you haven't yet explained. It all hangs on my choice and I tell you now that I am not going to play" (236). This refusal to (re)act both repeats the novel's fundamental debate regarding the possibility of radical agency in the vacuum of postmodernity and illuminates Eagle's dramatic final act of defiance: the unmaking of Calf Island. Faced with the futility of any action, either positively or negatively charged, Eagle refuses to act at all, a choice with profound implications. In his exploration of the concept of violence, Žižek discusses the revolutionary power concentrated in the mass repudiation of one of the essential "democratic rituals of freedom":

> What happens is that by abstaining from voting, people effectively dissolve the government—not only in the limited sense of overthrowing the existing government, but more radically. Why is the government thrown into such a panic by the voters' abstention? It is compelled to confront the fact that it exists, that it exerts power, only insofar as it is accepted as such by its subjects—accepted even in the mode of rejection. The voters' abstention

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> goes further than the intra-political negation, the vote of no confidence: it rejects the very frame of decision. (216 *Violence*)

Eagle's act is thus not one of simple passivity or surrender, but rather one that violently refuses the constraints of a forced "pseudo-activity" the purpose of which is to secure the operation and legitimacy of the existent system (Žižek 216-17).

Rather than validate the terms of the status quo through either capitulation or reactionary negation, Eagle instead imagines an altogether new set of terms. Momentarily tempted to preserve the Rose, to appropriate its limitless power for good, Eagle suddenly recalls the "people of K reduced to a blind philosophy of pure survival, clutching obsessively at the shreds of their individuality, knowing within themselves that they were powerless to alter the circumstances in which they lived" (251). Instead of acting in reformist fashion from within (and thereby perpetuating) the stable coordinates of an assumed ground, Eagle simply re-imagines the ground itself, re-conceptualizing Calf Island from scratch and dismantling the ideological obstructions of Grimus's sub-endimions: "I made a picture grow in my head, a picture of Calf Island as one thing, Grimushome at its peak, the steps leading down to Liv's outcrop. No Gates, no barriers" (252). Next, he carefully re-imagines into existence every molecular detail of Calf Island save one, the Stone Rose itself. Elated by their continued existence in the absence of the Rose, guarantor of Calf Island's former reality, Eagle and Media spontaneously make love on the mountainside as strange mists begin to gather:

> Slowly, slowly, they were descending, closing in upon the island on all sides, closer, closer, a dense grey fog now, closing, closing. And they were not mists. Deprived of its connection with all relative Dimensions, the world of Calf Mountain was slowly unmaking itself, its molecules and atoms breaking, dissolving, quietly vanishing into primal, unmade energy. (253)

By rejecting the fundamental framework of Grimus's system rather than merely opposing it (after the classic agonistic pattern represented by Moonshy), Eagle opens up the truly radical space of possibility, the literal *no-place* of utopian figuration or, in Marin's terms, the space of the *neutral*, which he describes as a kind of consciousness that is not yet a conscious-

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ness of the definite. The virtuality of the neutral, in itself "unthinkable, imponderable" (14), reveals the limits of thought within the life-world of the system and thus traces a kind of "zero" that is not yet the third term beyond binary opposition but rather the non-space out of which such a third term might emerge:

> it is the synthesis of the contraries reduced to a state of pure virtuality. . . .Neither one nor the other, waiting to be one *and* the other, it has the power (for it is no longer simply passage from one to the other) to allow both to recognize the figure of their superior unity and mastery. The neutral is also the sign of the absolute 'polemicity' and the mark of their mutual destruction. (16)

Thus, we might also recognize the neutralization of Calf Island as the site of Badiou's void, what we have defined as the ruptural gap within a situation that marks the evental site, fidelity to which constitutes the new political subjectivity. Beyond the constraints of conventional or traditional significations, laws, and philosophies, the void is the pre-symbolic space of a situation yet to come. Necessarily founded upon the insubstantial and incommunicable, fidelity to the event demands a decisive act on the part of the subject, an act that, from within the enclosures of the present situation, appears nonsensical if not literally unimaginable. As the examples cited above demonstrate, this kind of fidelity to an unseen truth, punctuated by a series of impossible assertions, characterizes Eagle's quest from its beginning in Axona to its culmination on Calf Island, such that the no-place of the novel's conclusion realizes "a new coherence that is instituted by the interruption of the repetitive series that made up the whole previous social order" (Badiou, *Theory* 164). By situating the novel's conclusion within the context of a radical utopianism, we therefore complicate politically cynical (and cyclical) readings—Uma Parameswaran observes, for instance, that "at the end Eagle and Media presumably return to the world as we know it" (36)—and discover instead ways in which *Grimus*, by periodizing or historicizing the "worldless" present, opens imaginative space for a world yet to be.

During Flapping Eagle's mortal struggle with the Inner Dimensions, the narrator offers an important commentary on the exhilarating early days of Virgil's adventures with Grimus and Deggle:

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> There had been trips to the real, physical, alternative space-time continua. So close, yet such an eternity away. And there had been his own annihilating journey into the Inner Dimensions, like the internal inferno which now clutched Flapping Eagle, which had left him hollow and impotent and lucky to be alive. And there was the third kind.
>
> The Bridge between the first two kinds.
>
> With sufficient imagination, Virgil Jones had found, one could create worlds, physical, external worlds, neither aspects of oneself nor a palimpsest-universe.
>
> Fictions where a man could live.
>
> In those days, Mr. Jones had been a highly imaginative man. (74–75)

Virgil's theoretical "third space," a tangible, material reality that is neither the internal fantasy space of individual wish fulfillment nor the zero-sum reality of Grimus in which transformation is reduced to reorganization, defines for us the novel's underlying utopianist agenda. This gesture toward an interstitial third space, an *impossible* alternative situated between the absolute terms of a constrictive binary formulation, announces the dialectical project at the novel's heart as well as its attention not to the defined problematic of postcolonial national/cultural identity, but to the as yet uncharted topoi of an ongoing globalization.

Like Teverson, I argue that the tension between the opposed philosophical perspectives of Virgil and Grimus lies at the very center of the novel's socio-political engagement and, I would add, provides the fundamental contradiction from which emerges the book's radically utopian impulse. Unlike Teverson, however, I suggest that the developmental trajectory of Rushdie's fiction is not "from science fiction to history" but rather *to* history *through* science fiction.[12] That is, *Midnight's Children* is the result not of the hard-scrabble lessons Rushdie managed to salvage from the submerged wreck of his first, failed novel but of the narrative strategies and historical sensibilities *successfully* worked out through its composition. Indeed, it is tempting to claim that we cannot properly read *Midnight's Children* without first having read *Grimus* as a work of utopian science fiction. And inasmuch as this later work helped to instantiate the field of postcolonial studies, we must likewise consider the implications of its having been a work of science fiction all along.

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Notes

1. My strategic collapsing of these two generic trends relies on Darko Suvin's influential claim that utopia is no longer a genre in its own right but rather "the *sociopolitical subgenre of science fiction*" (61).

2. Cundy further suggests that *Grimus* figures a merely "nascent and tentative study of migrant identity. . . a chaotic fantasy with no immediately discernable arguments of any import" (131). The novel's fantastical "voyage of discovery," she claims, ultimately "buckles under the weight of the different elements it seeks to assimilate." Similarly, in a 1992 study, James Harrison gives this developmentalist account a curious nuptial twist by claiming that the reader who first encounters *Grimus* "after reading any or all of Rushdie's next three novels will, like a newly married couple exploring each other's family albums, recognize the early stages of what they are familiar with in the later version" (33). Harris further maintains that in *Grimus* Rushdie "has not yet found either the theme or the style that will allow him to be the writer he will in time become," that his first novel "lacks energy, stylistic assertiveness, and confidence in what it is attempting to be, but the potential for most such qualities is there" (40). The arch skepticism of these readings of the early 1990s can be traced in each case to the groundbreaking analysis of Timothy Brennan's *Salman Rushdie and the Third World* (1989), the first scholarly monograph on the author and the first critical treatment to sound a timely note of caution regarding his cosmopolitan appeals to a modernist/ postmodernist aestheticism as well as his ability to speak to Third-World interests. For Brennan, the singularly fatal flaw of *Grimus* is its refusal to ground its profoundly dialogic narrative innovations in a definite national culture:

> It would be hard to find a novel that demonstrated better the truth of Fanon's claim that a culture that is not national is meaningless. For if novels do not necessarily have to be set in one location, or be resistantly pure to foreign importations, they must be anchored in a coherent "structure of feeling," which only actual communities can create. . . *Grimus* fails even though it is carried off with professional brilliance simply because it lacks a *habitus*. (70)

As a result, Brennan goes on to assert in an oft-quoted passage, *Grimus* "doesn't know where it is and 'tries on' cultures like used clothing" (71). The problem thus seems to be that the polyphonic excesses of the novel's complex tropology cannot be sensibly interpreted within a postcolonial hermeneutic and its now familiar taxonomy of binaries. Indeed, as Brennan himself phrases it, "If the conflict between Third World peoples and European colonizers is evident here,

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it is carried out in terms so metaphorical as to be unrecognizable." Such an assessment, I contend, indicates not so much the limitations of Rushdie's novel as the unsuitability of the reading practices routinely applied to it.

3. Carmen Dell'Aversano remarks that Rushdie's literary style, "initially marked by a high degree of conformity to the rules and conventions of a well-defined literary genre of science fiction" will "later evolve into an unmistakenly personal narrative technique" (62). Similarly, while recognizing that "Rushdie's desire to draw on the genre of science fiction may account in part for some of the ingeniousness of the narrative," Cundy argues nonetheless that his justification for turning to SF (it is "traditionally a good vehicle for the novel of ideas") is ultimately "inadequate as a reason for employing the genre" (136). Citing Eric S. Rabkin's definition of SF as a form that elicits "feelings of alienation and transformation," Cundy contends that while both attitudes are present in the work, the alienating impulse of *Grimus* "is not as yet politicized," that its "transformation is still more of a fantastic than a social nature" (136-37). The novel's reliance on SF, these readings imply, is as little more than a set of literary training wheels for the artist who is as yet unable or unwilling to chart the aesthetic trajectories of postcolonial hybridity and marvelous realism. As Cundy observes, "The desire to employ specific genres at this stage, however inappropriate they might ultimately prove, is perhaps a defense against the impending loss of narrative control that might come from the attempt to create the truly hybrid novel" (137). Postcolonial hybridity is thus routinely presented as the determinate telos, the point of artistic arrival, toward which *Grimus* (failingly) aspires, and not until Rushdie shrugs off the restrictive conventions of SF does he free himself for this progression.

4. For Badiou, the political subject is never an individual but rather a configuration of multiples situated around the Event on the void's horizon. As Feltham explains, Badiou's "subject is not so much an agent as a series of meetings, tracts, protests and occupations of parliament" (111), in essence a subject-effect. In this sense, Flapping Eagle is not himself a subject but rather an allegorical placeholder for a future subjectivity.

5. While Badiou later revises in *Being and Event* certain peripheral aspects of the argument first advanced in *Theory of the Subject*, particularly those concerning the link he initially posits between destruction and the emergence of the new, I retain here his early advocation of a Benjaminian "divine violence" as a form of the imaginative neutralization (or subtraction) of the existent order necessary for authentic utopian figuration.

6. As he writes in *Metapolitics*, "there is no theory of the subject in Althusser, nor could there ever be one" (59). Althusser posits instead "only processes," and

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the subject is merely a product of the interpellating mechanisms of the State (59, 63).

7. This is an important formal element in that the novel's first chapter recounts the rescue of Flapping Eagle by Virgil and Dolores after he has already washed ashore on Calf Island. The descriptions in chapter two of the "real" world that Eagle has left behind are thus already at one remove from the world of the primary action, formally sealing off his past for the reader as a kind of insubstantial dream reality.

8. It is perhaps not incidental that his first steps into the broader world also rehearse the universalizing impulses of modernization itself.

9. Indeed, "from the perspective of the United States," Vietnam might be said to mark "the final moment in the imperialist tendency and thus a point of passage to a new regime of the Constitution," a transition, from another point of view, from the now "impassable" model of a coercive European imperialism to the flexible hegemony of Empire (Hardt and Negri 179). As Hardt and Negri go on to argue, the Vietnam War crystallized, from the US perspective, the global "accumulation of struggles" that formed the "virtual unity of the international proletariat" (262-63). And though this virtual global proletariat never achieved actual political manifestation, the undeniable pressures it exerted in its shared struggle against international capital—causing in fact the crises of the late 1960s and early 1970s themselves—catalyzed the transformation of capital into its current form (276).

10. See Badiou's *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* and Žižek's *The Fragile Absolute or, Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?*

11. Her name, in another coded inscription of Grimus's presence, replicates in Roman numerals his eternally static age.

12. Adducing convincing parallels between *Midnight's Children* and the Waverly novels of Walter Scott, Teverson draws upon influential theorizations of the historical novel offered by Avrom Fleishman and Harry Shaw. Only briefly, and on the essay's final page, does he reference the foundational work to which each of these later theorizations ultimately traces its derivation: Georg Lukác's magisterial *The Historical Novel* (1962). If we are to take seriously Rushdie's speculative turn in Grimus, however, we must acknowledge, as Jameson and Carl Freedman have done, the recent re-discovery of Lukác's historical novel beneath the cosmic raiment of narrative SF. See Jameson's *Archaeologies of the Future* and Carl Freedman's *Critical Theory and Science Fiction*.

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"One must make a distinction, however": Marianne Moore and Democratic Taste

Patrick Redding

> The root & seed of democracy is the doctrine Judge for yourself.
> —Emerson (4: 342))

This essay attempts to characterize the thinking of Marianne Moore on the nature and purpose of aesthetic taste in a democratic culture. Moore stands within one of two traditions of thought on the subject, though "tradition" may be somewhat too strong a word to describe a constellation of writers without a self-consciously declared affiliation to one another. Those in the first camp, which includes Alexis de Tocqueville, Henry Adams, Henry James (in some moods), George Santayana, Friedrich Nietzsche, and José Ortega y Gasset, cast a suspicious glance upon democracy because of its apparent hostility to personal distinction and artistic achievement. These writers resent the spread of democratic ideals into the realm of culture, and accuse egalitarian forms of government of suppressing artistic *quality* in the name of political *equality*. Santayana offers a concise formulation of this line of argument in his polemical remarks about Walt Whitman in "The Poetry of Barbarism":

> Democracy was not to be merely a constitutional device for the better government of given nations, not merely a movement for the material improvement of the lot of the poorer classes. It was to be a social and moral democracy and to involve an actual equality among all men. Whatever kept them apart and made it impossible for them to be messmates together was to be discard-

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> ed. The literature of democracy was to ignore all extraordinary gifts of genius or virtue, all distinction drawn even from great passions or romantic adventures. (112)

For Santayana, a government organized by popular sovereignty is a worthy and enlightened political idea, at least in theory. The problem with egalitarian politics is that it leads the public to resent and repress those persons who achieve some measure of cultivated accomplishment in society. When the standards of egalitarianism are applied to the realm of culture, there is no longer any reason to honor literary "distinction" or appeal to "higher" tastes, since each of these categories presume a form of social hierarchy, and social hierarchy violates the democratic creed that all persons are created equal. Once the democratic public begins to clamor for equality in every sphere of social life, Santayana suggests, political ambition and artistic refinement are sacrificed to the vulgar passions and common standards of the mob.

A second strand of thought, which includes figures like John Stuart Mill (with reservations), Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, William James, Henry James (in some moods), and John Dewey, celebrates democracy's potential for spreading a measure of cultural ambition throughout the populace, encouraging ordinary citizens to strive for and attain the rare and distinguished. For these writers, democracy names a minimal condition of political equality out of which the forms of individuality can be given definition. On this account, the distinctive and idiosyncratic expressions of the individual imagination become the proof by which political equality justifies itself. It is this cluster of assumptions that leads John Dewey to reject the idea of democracy as a "leveler" of cultural achievement or artistic genius. On the contrary, Dewey writes, "moral equality means incommensurability, the inapplicability of common and quantitative standards. . . Democracy will not be democracy until education makes it its chief concern to release distinctive aptitudes in art, thought, and companionship." A democrat regards "equality," Dewey concludes, as "that of distinction made universal" (*Individuality* 79-80).

Distinction: the word surfaces in the vocabulary of both Santayana and Dewey when discussing democracy's relation to aesthetic taste, and, as we shall see, it makes another prominent appearance at a crucial moment in Marianne Moore's "Poetry." Yet this word generally carries pejorative overtones among contemporary literary scholars, in large part because

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of the influential sociological writings of Pierre Bourdieu.[1] Bourdieu's insights into the symmetry between distinction in art and in society—that the act of aesthetic evaluation serves to reproduce the structures of social hierarchy—should be disturbing to anyone in the literary profession who hopes to encourage a more just and equitable distribution of knowledge and aesthetic pleasure. For Bourdieu, artists and their academic interpreters feed off the system of social distinction that confers upon them cultural prestige. They (we) are seduced by the elevated ambitions of difficult art, which require them (us) to join hands with the wealthy patrons, think tanks, and academic institutions that fund and consume the works that they (we) read, write about, or teach. Scholars such as John Guillory, James English, and Mark McGurl have convincingly shown how Bourdieu's arguments apply to the American as well as the French literary field, implicating those institutions that employ university professors as well as the publishers and consumers that create the market for literary commodities.[2] This body of work offers a forceful reminder that the utopian promise of a democratic culture—a promise that the average citizen will be given the opportunity and training to enjoy the most vivid and esteemed works of art—cannot be delivered without a drastic redistribution of cultural capital and access to higher learning. Still, it is important to remind ourselves that in addition to a radical reconfiguration of finite material resources and symbolic goods—an endeavor for which literary scholars possess only limited expertise and marginal political clout—we might also work to change the longstanding democratic prejudice against making value judgments, as if to draw a distinction or to praise one object over another constituted a betrayal of egalitarian society. In the wake of Bourdieu and his American expositors, we now know that the promises of democratic culture tend to be made most often by those with the greatest institutional power. But in the course of gaining this important new knowledge, we may have forgotten to challenge the terms in which those promises were made in the first place.

This essay will turn to the early work of Marianne Moore in order to revise our assumptions about the relation between democratic ideals and the act of aesthetic judgment. While it would be an exaggeration to say that Moore fits snugly within the second tradition outlined above, it is significant that she read the works of Mill, Emerson, William and Henry James, and Dewey in the formative stages of her early career as a poet. Drawing on unpublished notebooks from Moore's archive, and

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offering close readings of two early poems, "The Labours of Hercules" (1921) and "Poetry" (1919-1925), I will indicate some of the ways that democratic writers influenced her thinking. In addition to the books that Moore read, her attitude toward democratic culture was also shaped by the social movements of the Progressive Era, including an exposure to first-wave feminism and socialism as a college student at Bryn Mawr. Before we can fully appreciate Moore's ability to reconcile democratic commitment with artistic complexity and difficulty, it will be useful to linger over those aspects of her biography that helped make these poems possible for her—and for us.

The "Modern Democratic Ideal" at Bryn Mawr and beyond

While attending college at Byrn Mawr (1905-1909) and teaching school in Carlisle, Pennsylvania (1910-1917), Moore developed a deeply democratic sensibility—an almost intuitive way of regarding other people as equals in light of their innate dignity and potential for personal transformation. During her education at a women's college, Moore became increasingly drawn to the suffragist movement because of her belief in the political equality of citizens regardless of their sex. In a letter of 1907, Moore makes note of attending a suffragist lecture by progressive reformer and Hull House founder Jane Addams (Molesworth 42). During her first trip to New York City in February 1909, Moore listened to speeches by several prominent supporters of suffragism, such as John Dewey, Harriet Stanton Blach (the daughter of Elizabeth Cady Stanton), and Mr. Charles Zeublin, a professor of sociology at the University of Chicago. After Dr. Zeublin's lecture, Moore concluded that women should seek social equality for the sake of preserving feminine individuality: "Suffrage is not a question of superiority or the lack of it; it is a question of personality, and that the woman is as sacred as the man" (Molesworth 56). Zeublin's message continued to resonate with Moore once she returned home to Pennsylvania, as she later spoke of this meeting as a "joy" (*Selected* 61). Once back at Bryn Mawr, Moore continued to look for opportunities to discuss suffragist ideas with her classmates and with her family. In a letter to her mother and brother, Moore wrote excitedly about a recent lecture on women's rights: "Miss Shaw spoke last night on the Modern Demo-

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cratic Ideal. I couldn't say how she delighted me. No decent, half-kind, creature could possibly think of fighting suffrage if he or it had heard her arguments" (63). At times, Moore's moral fervor for equality led her to rebuke the social snobbery of her classmates. In a letter, Moore records a contentious conversation about suffragism with a friend named Elsie:

> of course women's suffrage doesn't mean much to you, because you're petted and have money lavished on you and you wouldn't think what a slum looks like and wouldn't think of touching an infected horse-hide or dangerous machinery for anything, but a lot of girls that haven't quite your chances could see why it might help some. (64-65).

This earnest passion for siding with the neglected and downtrodden instead of those in power would display itself again and again in Moore's earliest poetry.

Moore's engagement with the suffragist movement was not limited to her experiences at Bryn Mawr. Upon moving to Carlisle in 1910, Moore and her mother devoted much of their energy to promoting the suffragist cause in their local community, including brief articles and announcements for the *Carlisle Evening Sentinel*. In the spring of 1912, Moore confided to her brother, John Warner Moore, that her "murmurings of socialism and women's suffrage" had scandalized one of the neighbors (Molesworth 91). By the following spring, Moore was again writing to her brother about her growing interest in feminist activism. During a recent trip to Washington, D.C., Moore explains in a letter, she studied the Woman Suffrage program, which sparked a desire to march with fellow authors and artists as a sign of provocation to Woodrow Wilson's newly elected administration. Moore's brother cautioned her against such open displays of dissent (which she obeyed), warning that such radical activity would likely make an unflattering impression upon the teachers and the students at the Carlisle Indian School where she worked. In hindsight, John Warner Moore's fear seems justified: in 1914 he was forced to intervene on Moore's behalf after the school's superintendent, Mr. Friedman, grew concerned that Moore's commitment to radical causes had undermined her patriotism (95, 97). Frustrated with her job, Moore quit teaching and began to devote herself even more extensively to the suffragist cause. Both the poet and her mother were active in the Women Suffrage Party of Pennsylvania, and served on its Committee to Organize

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Cumberland County. In September 1915, Moore traveled to a county fair in order to "distribute suffrage leaflets and talk to farmers" (*Selected* 99). On this occasion, Moore writes that her activism was well received and generally persuasive: "Today I did so much talking Hall [Cowdry] said I ought to go on the stump. The people surely were respectful and every man but three said they would vote for suffrage in November."

Moore's attitude toward suffragism was not just a practical application of her feminism; it was also an expression of her extensive reading in political philosophy during these formative years. Instead of individual college "majors," the curriculum at Bryn Mawr required students to choose two related "groups" of study; Moore's groups were (1) History and (2) Political Science and Economics (often abbreviated as "Pol. Econ." or "Policon" in her letters).[3] Moore's favorite professor at Bryn Mawr was Theodore de Laguna, who taught the history of philosophy and its contemporary developments. In a lecture notebook from de Laguna's class in her senior year, Moore notes that "practical dialectics make you lose your faith in the divine prob[ability] of laws," indicating one way that Greek philosophy reflected "the rise of the age of democracy" (VII: 11: 05: 47). In her class notes on modern philosophy, Moore writes that John Dewey's "educational theory" and "pragmatism" are his philosophy's "most important feature[s]" (VII: 11: 06). De Laguna's approach to philosophy was rather different from the training in precise linguistic analysis that is taught today. Her philosophical education was not focused upon questions of logic and epistemology, but encompassed a broad range of problems in ethics and the history of ideas.

Moore's major in "Policon" forced her to grapple with fundamental systems of political theory, such as monarchy, oligarchy, liberalism, and republicanism. According to the Bryn Mawr course catalogue, the purpose of Moore's spring 1908 course in Political Theory was "to study the theory of modern democracy as the political organization best adapted to secure individual liberty and social well-being."[6] The syllabus for this course started with Plato, Polybius, and Aristotle, and worked its way up to such Enlightenment figures as Locke and Rousseau. But Moore's political education did not simply terminate in the eighteenth-century French *philosophes*. In a political science class taken in the spring of her senior year, Moore composed an essay entitled "John Stuart Mill: His Evolution from Utilitarian to Romanticist" that drew on Mill's *Autobiography* and Alexander Bain's *Life of Mill* (VII: 12: 06). From her studies in "Policon" at

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Bryn Mawr, it is safe to say that Moore was directly acquainted with the major ideas and arguments of modern liberalism.

Moore also tackled political concerns in classes taken outside her major. For an English course in "Imitative Writing," she often wrote on topics that were political in nature. In one assignment, for instance, Moore imitated the prose of J. S. Mill's *On Liberty*. The resulting essay not only echoed Mill's ideas, but also attempted to imitate his rationalistic style of analysis, as we can see from the essay's thesis statement: "There are three types of liberty which may be considered and recognized: liberty of person, liberty of politics, liberty of aesthetic judgment" (np). In another of her "Imitative Writing" exercises, Moore explored the virtues of socialism, a topic with which she was already familiar, as her mother was a strong admirer of John Ruskin and William Morris. In a remarkably idiosyncratic essay entitled "Socialism," Moore adopted the style of Richard Hooker's *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity,* a work of Elizabethan political thought, in order to argue for the validity of state-run public services:

> To take away all grievances, privations, immoralities there is no way but only by devising harmony among ourselves; by instituting some new jurisdiction public, and by adapting ourselves thereunto; that unto whom we concede power to legislate and adjust public resources, by them the calm, prosperity, and health of all may be attained. We know that when violence is offered we may be defenders of ourselves—we know that however we seek our felicity if this be done with ill adventure unto others, it is not to be tolerated but by all men and all methods hindered. But we know that each man's duty is to consider his own welfare and we think that state administration of state products insures this, and that else, "graft" and contention are endless. Therefore, with consent of all it should be agreed, that money shall no longer be lord over all but ~~a support, apportioned equally among all men~~, a support granted ~~permitted~~ to all men as in the governmental program of the Socialists.[5]

This excerpt from her college notebooks shows that Moore not only studied the history of philosophy, politics, and economics while at Bryn Mawr, she also practiced the forceful style of argumentation used by political theorists like Hooker and Mill. The cerebral, Latinate quality of Moore's early poetry is often attributed to her admiration for baroque

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prose stylists such as Sir Thomas Browne, Jeremy Taylor, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who each wrote extensively on religious subjects. Yet during college Moore also learned how to synthesize the grand prose style with political polemic. This synthesis would make itself felt stylistically in the twisted syntax and abstract diction of her poems in the years to come.

Despite Bryn Mawr's difficult entrance examinations, Moore evaluated her college education by standards that reflect the educational idealism of the Progressive era. What she most loved about her college experience was the freedom it gave to each student to discover her own intellectual and aesthetic tastes. In a letter to Winifred Bryher from 1923, Moore describes her college years as a laboratory for the development of artistic individuality for which freedom from coercion remains an essential prerequisite:

> The net result of my experiences at Bryn Mawr was to make me feel that intellectual wealth can't be superimposed, that it is to be appropriated; my experience there gave me security in my determination to have what I want. I can't very well illustrate, it would take too long, the more since you and Hilda [Doolittle] and I are at the antipodes from each other in our notions of education. In an article on the advantage to a musician of university training, a journalist quotes a friend of mine who is a musician as saying that her college experience gave her "a sense of repose and conscientious strength" and "developed good taste and the power to think problems through," "breadth of style and a more strongly defined colour sense." At Bryn Mawr the students are allowed to develop with as little interference as is compatible with any kind of academic order and the more I see of other women's colleges, the more I feel that Bryn Mawr was peculiarly adapted to my special requirements. (*Selected Letters* 178)

In Moore's eyes, Bryn Mawr provided the ideal institutional circumstances in which to cultivate the "special requirements" of a fledgling poet. Though leisure, "security," and "determination" are among the qualities needed, she also reveals her commitment to an exploratory and experiential approach to education, one that relies on acts of personal appropriation and self-cultivation rather than a regimented program of instruction. Knowledge should not be "superimposed" through the "interference" of school authorities, she argues. It must begin with the student

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rather than the teacher. In this respect, Moore promotes an educational model of self-development—what today we might call "active student learning"—rather than passive reception, not just freedom from authority, but also freedom to embrace one's own authority. For Moore, literary education is based upon a student's willingness to compose a coherent "experience" for herself. It is no accident that the word "experience" appears several times in this letter; it was a key category for many Progressive Era reformers. In this respect, Moore's description of the relationship between education and experience invites comparison to John Dewey, who defined the act of thinking as "an explicit rendering of the intelligent element in our experience" (142). This quotation comes from Dewey's *Democracy and Education,* a text that Moore read in 1917 (Notebooks 1250/2: 39-40). It would leave its imprint on several of her earliest poems, including "Poetry."

Moore's reading notebooks document a sustained interest in philosophical and political argument during her formative years as a young poet. A sampling of titles she read between 1913 and 1917 demonstrate an eclectic and demanding regimen: Carlyle's *French Revolution,* a review of Bertrand Russell's *Problems of Philosophy,* F. H. Bradley's *Appearance and Reality,* numerous articles about socialism and democracy by G. B. Shaw, journalism by Randolph Bourne, Hegel's *An Introduction to the Philosophy of History,* Prior's life of Edmund Burke and Burke's "Letter to a Noble Lord" (Notebooks, 1250/1 and 1250/2). In 1916, Moore read an article on John Dewey's philosophy of education, and in 1917 she made several notes on Dewey's *Essays in Experimental Logic* and *Democracy and Education.* (Notebooks 1250/2: 39-40). Among Moore's critics, much has been made of her visit to Alfred Stieglitz's "291" gallery in 1915, and of her exposure to modernist enthusiasts like Alfred Kreymborg, who edited the little magazine *Others* that published some of Moore's best early work. There is no doubt that Moore's encounter with Stieglitz introduced her to some of the most innovative experiments in modernist art and the most important literary circles in New York. It is also important, however, to remember how often Moore, in the privacy of her study, sought out encounters with the major thinkers of political and philosophical modernity during her early development as a poet.

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Overcoming the Master: Henry James's critique of democratic form

More than any other literary influence, it was Henry James who taught Moore how to approach the question of aesthetic taste in a democratic culture. As Linda Leavell has shown, Moore was deeply devoted to James's non-fiction, especially his autobiographies and letters, which she read voraciously in the years 1913-1920 (231). We catch something of Moore's relationship to James simply through the title of her mid-career essay, "Henry James as a Characteristic American" (1934). This essay betrays the degree to which Moore identifies with James's contradictory desire to be both an American and an artist; she even told a friend that the essay contained her "outlook on life" (Leavell 238). Like James, Moore is drawn to a way of imagining the acquisition of good taste as an aspect of the acquisition of national identity. When Moore quotes from James in this essay, it as if his words could speak for her, too: "'Culture as I hold, is a matter of attitude quite as much as of opportunity,' he said in *Notes of a Son and Brother*, and 'one's supreme relation, as one had always put it, was one's relation to one's country'" (*Prose* 318). A decade earlier, Moore had already accepted the complex fate of the American artist by quoting from James in the final line of "New York" (1921). "It is not the plunder, / it is the 'accessibility to experience,'" that makes the great metropolis so alluring and so representative of American desires, blurring the line between political innocence and economic rapacity (*Becoming* 267). For Moore, Henry James and his family embodied the aspiration to a life of the mind in the context of modern America. As Leavell succinctly summarizes: "The James family was [Moore's] model of democracy, and James himself her model American" (237).

That Moore turned to Henry James in order to think through the meaning of democratic culture in America seems rather counter-intuitive, given James's famous ambivalence and occasional condescension towards his native country. In *The American Scene* (1907), a book that Moore read with great care, James registers the shocking social and economic changes that had taken place in his homeland after an absence of nearly thirty years. Upon first arrival, he writes, the foreigner will be greeted by "the monstrous form of Democracy, which is thereafter to project its shifting angular shadow, at one time and another, across every inch of the field of

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his vision. It is the huge democratic broom that has made the clearance and that one seems to see brandished in the empty sky" (54-55). The levseling tendencies of democracy threaten to blot out the tourist's "vision," sweeping away the gradations in contour and color that make for nuanced perception. Much as Tocqueville feared the coercion of the individual by the will of the majority, so James feared that the hulking masses would obliterate any possibility for fine distinctions or artistic discrimination. Walking through New York City at the turn of the century, James was repulsed by "the consummate monotonous commonness, of the pushing male crowd, moving in its dense mass—with the confusion carried to chaos for any intelligence, any perception; a welter of objects and sounds in which relief, detachment, dignity, meaning, perished utterly and lost all rights" (83). Like Santayana, James's main objection to the democratic hordes lies in the capacity of the group to eliminate personal detachment and perspective. Plunged into a teeming crowd of immigrants, James was unable to find a standpoint from which to perceive, compare, or compose a defined portrait of the American people. Here and elsewhere in *The American Scene,* he likens the effect of democracy upon artistic vision to the application of a coat of white paint, effectively whitewashing the multicolored hues and shadowy depths of contemporary life:

> It was only another case of the painting with a big brush, a brush steeped in crude universal white, and of the colossal size this implement was capable of assuming. Gradations, transitions, differences of any sort, temporal, material, social, whether in man or in his environment, shrank somehow, under its sweep, to negligible items; and one had perhaps never yet seemed so to move through a vast simplified scheme. (305)

These are the morbid reflections of a lifelong aesthete, recoiling in horror from an environment that seems completely inhospitable to careful discriminations and cultivated intelligence. In his later non-fiction, James suggests that American democracy presents the most recalcitrant social conditions imaginable for an artist, refusing to acknowledge the "gradations, transitions, differences" that provide the grounds for subtle novelistic incident and carefully structured melodrama—the kind of fiction James himself tried to write.

Given these facts, it is difficult to imagine how James's vision of America could have appealed to Marianne Moore as she attempted to

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formulate a positive relationship between democracy and artistic taste. A clue, I believe, comes in another essay that James published several years after *The American Scene*. In "The New Novel" (1914), James attacked the work of H. G. Wells and Arnold Bennett, among others, for rejecting the discipline of literary form in the name of democracy.[6] James found these novels disturbing because of their

> complacent declaration of a common literary level, a repudiation the most operative even if the least reasoned of the idea of differences, the virtual law, as we may call it, of sorts and kinds, the values of individual quality and weight in the presence of undiscriminated quantity and rough-and-tumble 'output' in the novel's composition and on the esthetic plane. (*Literary* 125-26)

James's remarks offer an interesting speculation on the sociology of the modern novel: the sprawling and apparently directionless shape of novels by Wells and Bennett are seen to reflect the loss of social "form" in democratic societies. As the essay continues, James specifies the limited relevance of egalitarian ideas to the artist's compositional process. Unlike the political world, the construction of a novel depends on its author's respect for plot organization, characterization, and compositional sequence. In James's view, the health of the modern novel was threatened by "the incurable democratic suspicion of the selective and comparative principles" (126) needed to write a formally self-conscious novel. Instead, contemporary writers were more likely "to regard, and above all to treat, one manner of book, like one manner of person, as, if not absolutely as good as another, yet good enough for any democratic use." James here attacks the argument-by-analogy so prevalent in discussions of democracy's impact on literature. He questions whether the principle of popular sovereignty—one person, one vote—has an application to spheres of inquiry where authority is not constituted by collective representation. For James, it is the task of the modern writer to assess his work critically and to insist on the use of "selective and comparative principles" so as to distinguish his work from that of his contemporaries. On this account, a democratic resistance to the hierarchies of social form should do little to shape an author's attitude toward literary form.

It was this refusal to conflate political equality with an undiscriminating attitude toward literary style and structure that left its mark on the early poetry of Marianne Moore. Unlike James, however, Moore has no

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lingering nostalgia for a world of "material [and] social" gradations. For this reason, Moore is able to absorb James's aesthetic critique of democracy without being distracted by his misgivings towards immigrants or regretful about the loss of certain aristocratic customs and manners. In poems like "The Labors of Hercules" and "Poetry," Moore attempts to define the proper relation between the egalitarian tendencies of democracy and the cultural distinction sought by art. Both poems make the case that the pleasures of difficult art need not be sacrificed in the name of bringing about a more egalitarian society. On the contrary, these poems imply that a respect for aesthetic complexity, personal individuality, and social difference is precisely what democratic politics aims to encourage and protect.

"Snobbishness is a stupidity": "The Labours of Hercules"

As its title suggests, "The Labours of Hercules" (1921) concerns itself with those tasks that seem extraordinarily challenging but nonetheless necessary to perform.[7] Like her hero Henry James, whose "love of doing hard things" she would later celebrate in "An Octopus" (1924), Moore believed that the most rewarding standards of excellence were those that were self-imposed (*Becoming* 217). The moral stakes of this position make themselves felt in the grammatical construction of this poem. Each lines begins with an infinitive verb unit, "To _____," followed by the relative pronoun "that," so that the list reads like a long series of injunctions: "To popularize" (line 1), "to persuade" (line 3), "to persuade" (line 6), "to teach" (line 12), "to prove" (line 18), "to teach" (line 23), "to convince" (line 28). This syntactical pattern binds together an otherwise disparate list of difficult actions, most of which focus on the act of persuasion. A surprising number of these Herculean "labors" concern the way we should think about the meaning of art: "to persuade one of austere taste, proud in the possession of home, and a musician— / that the piano is a free field for etching and that his 'charming tadpole notes' / belong to the past when one had time to play them" (265). Here, the target of Moore's argument is the stuffy homemaker or parlor-bound pedant whose musical palette does not accommodate the "free field" of improvisation. To one who lives by a strict code of classical decorum ("austere taste"), the piano

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serves primarily as a vehicle for the accurate performance of sheet music; the player achieves excellence when he or she can reproduce the "tadpole notes" of standard musical tabulation. These lines also challenge the notion that young women should occupy their time practicing the piano in preparation for a life spent in the domestic sphere. Such nineteenth-century feminine ideals are said to "belong to the past." By contrast, Moore tries to affirm freedom in several different guises: a freedom for women outside the home, a freedom to improvise, and a freedom from too restrictive a definition of what counts as musical art.

As "The Labours of Hercules" continues, Moore clarifies the meaning of her ideal of aesthetic freedom. To know that music is a "free field for etching" does not mean that an artist can relax his or her formal intelligence. On the contrary, expanding the boundaries of the permissible means knowing what one does and does not permit oneself. For this reason, Moore takes it upon herself

> to teach the bard with too elastic a selectiveness
> that one detects creative power by its capacity to eliminate
> detachment;
> that while it may have more elasticity than logic,
> it knows where it is going;
> it flies along in a straight line like electricity
> and devastates those areas that boast of their remoteness
>
> (*Becoming* 265)

Here Moore scolds those artists who are "too elastic" in their notion of "selectiveness," much as Henry James had scolded Wells and Bennett. Such "bards" are unwilling to hold themselves to exacting standards of composition, with the implied commitment to self-conscious editorial revision. For Moore, this inability to select or discriminate between one's creative impulses is a vapid parody of social tolerance; it stands for complacency towards one's audience rather than an enlightened open-mindedness. For this reason, Moore describes artistic tenacity in terms of *engagement* rather than *distance*. Instead of "detachment," she portrays the fastidious, self-conscious artist as someone who is more committed to articulating a successful formal design. When Moore revised these lines for book publication in 1924, she made this point even more explicit: "one detects creative power by its capacity to conquer one's detachment" (266). A poet's level of inspiration can be detected in her ability to overcome "detachment"

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and "remoteness" from the creative work at hand. While some critics have complained of the lack of autobiographical detail in Moore's poems, often comparing her approach to T. S. Eliot's poetics of "impersonality," in fact Moore affirmed an authorial stance that was deeply personal and expressive.[8] She disapproved of the desire to stand back from one's most vivid passions and intensities; paradoxically, it is one's overwhelming affection and love for art that encourages the artist to be her own best editor. A work of art must know "where it is going" while also remaining flexible and susceptible to fresh perceptions and personal impulses. It is a delicate balance: a true artist must be open to a variety of styles and possibilities, yet not have so "elastic a selectiveness" as to enjoy every mode of artifice she encounters. There must be limits to personal sympathy if one is to discover the peculiar affinities of personal taste.

In "The Labours of Hercules," the danger of artistic "detachment" lay in the desire to hold oneself aloof from the artist's responsibility to communicate through form. The remaining lines of the poem work through this connection between artistic "detachment" and the creation of unnecessary social hierarchies. Here we discover Moore's quiet sense of outrage at the obsequiousness and violence implicit in gentle acts of snobbery:

> to prove to the high priests of caste
> that snobbishness is a stupidity,
> the best side out, of age-old toadyism—
> kissing the feet of the man above,
> kicking the face of the man below: (*Becoming* 265)

Rather than cede the intellectual high ground to cultural elitists, Moore judges these "high priests of caste" by their own vaunted appeals to intelligence, coming to the conclusion that "snobbishness is a stupidity." In doing so, Moore reverses the usual associations between mental and aesthetic refinement and the upper strata of social class. On the contrary, Moore insists that true intelligence *opposes* snobbery. In "The Labours of Hercules," the pretension to social superiority is not simply a moral failing; it is an intellectual failing too, a lack of sophistication that demonstrates one's "stupidity." Moore asks the reader to overcome the temptation to describe artistic merit in terms of hierarchies, whether that involves bowing to the official arbiters of taste ("kissing the feet of the man above") or damning the existence of inferior craftsmen ("kicking the face of the man below").

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Moore shows how our motives for praising and blaming are related to one another. If we were not so concerned with conforming to contemporary critical fashion, then we might have the integrity to venture an independent judgment; equally, if we were not so busy condemning the work of others, we might find time to meditate on our own creative shortcomings, a process of self-critique that would result in a truer and more intimate knowledge than the kind gained through excessive "detachment."

Throughout "The Labours of Hercules," Moore remains aware that her arguments run counter to the conventional wisdom that democracy and anti-intellectualism go hand in hand. As the final lines of the poem make clear, she refuses to accept that democracy requires us to compromise intellectual standards and aspirations. For Moore, a culture of equality depends on the successful acquisition of a new kind of "knowing"—a species of tolerance that characterizes the rejection of ethnic stereotypes as a sign of human intelligence:

> to convince snake charming controversialists
> that is it one thing to change one's mind,
> another to eradicate it—that one keeps on knowing
> "that the negro is not brutal
> that the Jew is not greedy,
> that the Oriental is not immoral,
> That the German is not a Hun." (*Becoming* 265)

Moore's effort to unmask social pretension reaches an urgent climax in these lines. Racists and bigots are here compared to irrational "snake charming controversialists." Their charm is fraudulent: the snake kept in a basket (like people kept in the dark) lacks the muscle to strike back or escape. Though these snake charmers present themselves as gurus of secret knowledge, they are in fact bewitched by the hypnotic sound of their own myths and prejudices. On the account given here, social snobbery is a form of intellectual deprivation: to perpetuate stereotypes against blacks, Jews, Asians, and Germans is "to eradicate" one's "mind," to dispense with that which we must "keep on knowing." The poem attempts to defend the life of the mind as compatible with, and indeed essential to, the structure of democratic society. It teaches that the cultivation of tolerance and equality depends on the persistent use of the "mind" in the struggle for democratic justice.[9]

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In undertaking this argument, "The Labours of Hercules" proposes that aesthetic discrimination has a complex role to play in achieving social equality in a civilized society. In linking the fate of democracy with that of aesthetics, the poem anticipates that fusion of progressive politics and literary modernism evoked by Lionel Trilling's phrase "the liberal imagination." In the preface to his book of that title, Trilling wrote that "the word liberal is a word primarily of political import, but its political meaning defines itself by the quality of life it envisages, by the sentiments it desires to affirm" (xi). From the evidence of her early poetry, Marianne Moore also tried to sustain a vision of politics that would take account of the quality of our sentiments and affirmations as they make themselves known in acts of aesthetic judgment.

"one must make a distinction, however": "Poetry"

Throughout her early poetry, Moore repeatedly challenged the idea that the achievements of high culture were somehow contrary to the egalitarian principles of democracy. This project of reconciliation is given its most powerful articulation in Moore's "Poetry," first published in 1919. (Moore published many different versions of "Poetry" over the course of her career; I will address these revisions in the next section of the essay.) While the poem's opening words ("I, too, dislike it") are sometimes cited as an example of modernism's disdain for the chintzy artifice and mawkish sentiment of Victorian poetry, the poem can also be read as a critique of high modernism by one of its leading participants. In her capacity as reviewer and editor for modernist little magazines, Moore often promoted the new styles of Pound, Eliot, and Stevens; on this occasion, however, she offers a brusque rejoinder to the intellectual faddishness, brazen pedantry, and needless difficulty of some styles of experimental poetry. By distancing itself from the aura of pretension that surrounded much contemporary poetry, "Poetry" seeks to embrace the pleasures of artistic difficulty while insisting that the springs of the artistic impulse are not confined to any single social class or subject matter.

Having announced the poem's subject in its title, "Poetry" next introduces us to a speaker vexed by the linguistic medium in which she writes: "I, too, dislike it: there are things that are important / beyond all this fiddle. / Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, / one discovers that there is in / it after all a place for the genuine" (*Becoming*

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205). There are several abrupt shifts of tone in these opening lines. The speaker starts off from the assumption that we share her pose of ironic detachment ("I, too, dislike it"), as well as identify with her desire to move on to higher concerns ("things that are important"). From the curt and folksy dismissal in the second line ("beyond all this fiddle"), we learn that this speaker is only too happy to flaunt her preoccupation with matters more pressing than the refined art of poesy. The tone here is conversational, indeed confidential, the tone of someone who presumes her listener tacitly shares her opinion. In conceding her distaste for the very medium in which she works, Moore thus attempts to disarm the skeptical reader: "I, too, dislike it" is another way of saying "I am one of you, too."

Yet no sooner has Moore established common ground with her reader, then she quickly qualifies the terms of confidence shared by speaker and listener. In the next sentence, the voice of the speaker shifts from conspiratorial whisper to earnest concession, no longer certain whether mutual trust is shared by each party: "Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, / one discovers that there is in / it after all, a place for the genuine" (205). Our speaker no longer addresses her friend in the first person ("I"), but has retreated to the impersonal third person ("one"), a rhetorical stance that introduces some distance between the speaker and her words, as if retreating into a statement of general wisdom. Moore makes this grammatical adjustment as a way to maintain a shared sense of intimacy while politely and indirectly noting a potential point of disagreement between speaker and listener. For though she grants that her confidante also feels a "perfect contempt" for poetry, the speaker is perhaps alone in admitting that *she still reads it*. Much as she does in "The Labours of Hercules," Moore sacrifices the posture of detachment in order to reveal herself as a wearied but hopeful follower of the contemporary poetry scene. Her confession of continued interest despite a degree of disgust ("Reading it, however") is the first hint of the speaker's incorrigible curiosity, which now begins to overpower her initial stance of irony. The words that follow breathe a sigh of reluctant surrender ("there is in / it after all a place for the genuine"), having finally reached the point where she can admit in the presence of a fellow skeptic that reading poetry may yield genuine delight. In spite of poetry's social prestige—historically placed above drama and prose, at the pinnacle of the literary hierarchy—and despite its many associations with artifice and sentiment, it remains for Moore a medium that is able to give voice to authentic thoughts and feelings.

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Needless to say, this is one of the most attenuated and socially modest defenses of the lyric ever undertaken by a major writer. The poet that emerges from this characterization does not count herself one of Shelley's unacknowledged legislators of mankind. Nor does Moore's poet possess the confident assurance of Yeats's lonely bard, for whom "words alone are certain good" (7-8). Rather, her perspective is closer to that of Auden in "In Memory of W. B. Yeats": "poetry makes nothing happen" but "survives / In the valley of its making" and remains "a way of happening, a mouth" (242). Like Auden, Moore balked at Romantic exaggerations about the social efficacy of poetry; unlike him, however, she does not rest content with a chastened disbelief in the powers of the fictive, but aims to construct a space for vital new beliefs, pleasures, and feelings, what she calls later in the poem "imaginary gardens with real toads in them." The speaker of "Poetry" is willing to collude with our suspicions for a time, temporarily identifying with our possible reasons for negative appraisal, but her final purpose is to help the mistrustful reader overcome a skepticism toward poetry.

Moore's dialectical intelligence is nowhere on better display than in the middle stanzas of "Poetry." Her task in these lines is to map out an approach to modernist poetry that rejects its aura of social pretension without giving the illusion of easy accessibility. "These things are important," she writes, "not because a / high-sounding interpretation can be put upon them / but because they are useful." These lines counsel against cultivating an interest in poetry for the sake of bearing witness to one's good breeding or as a means of showing off one's interpretative dazzle. Rather, poetry possesses value because it is "useful," which, as Moore defines it in the next line, is exemplified by "Hands that can grasp, eyes / that can dilate, hair that can rise / if it must." "Useful," on this account, means something like biological and cognitive vitality—a kind of reinvigoration of the nervous system—rather than some purely instrumental or didactic utility. For Moore, the effects of genuine poetry are not remarkably different from regular exercise, a healthy diet, or a strong dose of caffeine: it makes your body and mind feel more alert and wakeful. As a gloss on Moore's sense of "useful," it may be useful to recall a line from the poem "People's Surroundings" (1922) where Moore connects physical sensation to practical intelligence: "those cool sirs with the explicit sensory apparatus of common sense" (*Becoming* 270). This way of defending the art of poetry is conducted in a very different cultural register than the writing of

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modernist poets like T. S. Eliot or Ezra Pound. For Moore, poetry matters not because it embodies the endangered virtues of Western civilization or because the conditions of modernity have forced poets to become difficult, but because poetry enlarges the scope of our natural intelligence. It is useful, in Kenneth Burke's phrase, "as equipment for living."[10]

The remaining lines of the second stanza elaborate on the ways in which poetry may be useful to its reader. When things "become so derivative as to become unintelligible," poetry reminds us of the dignity of common sense: "the / same thing may be said for all of us—we do not admire what we cannot understand." To Moore's way of thinking, poetry exists as an aid to self-knowledge, a process that is predicated on a minimal degree of intelligibility. In insisting that the reader "understand" a poem, the speaker makes herself vulnerable to the charge of anti-intellectualism, as if she were endorsing the reader's right to dismiss whatever seems interpretively challenging or initially obscure. But this type of accusation overlooks the perplexing and indeed obscure images that follow next:

> the bat,
> holding on upside down or in quest of something to
>
> eat, elephants pushing, a wild horse taking a roll,
> a tireless wolf under
> a tree, the immovable critic twinkling his skin like a
> horse that feels a flea, the base-
> ball fan, the statistician—case after case
> could be cited did
> one wish it (205)

Having said that we must first find poetry intelligible before we can offer our admiration, Moore implores her reader not to underestimate what cannot be grasped on first encounter. She rolls out this strange miscellany (a bat sleeping, elephants rushing to eat, a horse scratching an itch, a wolf waiting to hunt, a feverish critic, the passion for baseball or statistics) in order to show her sympathy with the reader who is baffled by such behaviors, yet their very oddity and specificity also caution the reader against glibly deciding that unfamiliar practices are automatically something "we cannot understand." Moore's obscure list thus has a heuristic value: she invites us to think hard before dismissing what seems difficult

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and strange, encouraging the reader to discover a hidden rationale lurking behind the seemingly incomprehensible. Each example brings to light a behavior that may appear odd, exaggerated, or pointless to the casual observer, but which tallies with the natural instincts of that particular creature. Her appeal to practical wisdom includes the common sense of the imagination—our capacity to offer a motive for an action that we would not undertake ourselves. "Poetry" advises that we seek to "understand" poems, but it also assumes the existence of a reader who is willing to work hard, within reason, to unravel the potential patterns and connections that underlay quick leaps of the poetic imagination.

Throughout the remaining stanzas of "Poetry," Moore's thinking remains restlessly dialectical, refusing to rest in complacent affirmations of accessibility or crude dismissals of superior quality. Having asserted that poetry is "a place for the genuine," she again attacks the cultural elitist that would limit the possibilities of poetry to traditional subjects and forms: "nor is it valid / to discriminate against 'business documents and school-books'; all these phenomena are important." For the speaker of this poem, the materials of poetry are as inclusive as the materials of life itself. Whether banal or profound, the sources of poetry are potentially limitless; it can be made out of almost any kind of fact, even the most seemingly mundane or prosaic. Moore resists a model of cultural stratification that would divide aesthetic experience into classes of "high" and "low." Instead, she regards commonplace objects such as "business documents and school-books" as potential sources of literature. (It is somewhat ironic that Tolstoy's diaries are the source for Moore's homely phrase.) Yet having made this expansive, Whitmanian gesture to include the materials of the ordinary world in our definition of poetry, the speaker also finds it necessary to add an important qualification: "One must make a distinction however: when dragged into prominence by half-poets, / the result is not poetry." Which is to say, even as we welcome the poetic possibilities of everyday materials, we must nonetheless insist that a distinction between demotic sources and artistic execution is well worth maintaining. That is the real difference between poets and "half-poets," and insisting on this distinction is central to the complex democratic stance that Moore develops throughout this poem. At no point in her development of a radically egalitarian view of poetic inspiration does Moore find it necessary to surrender the right to make aesthetic judgments. A reader should be able to discern the poetic in the commonplace without confusing

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the banalities of "half-poets" with the "genuine" stuff of authentic poetic labor. Moore thus regards poetry as an arena of potential to which anyone has access but few achieve success. The means by which a work of art is deemed distinctive is not unlike the process by which a democratic citizen becomes a political representative: through the push and pull of private opinion and public discussion, some are judged more qualified than others, and are legitimately entitled to the status of representative. Analogously, Moore emphasizes the act of aesthetic selection whereby an individual puts forth a candidate as a representative work of taste. It is important to recognize the directionality of Moore's gesture here. She aims to level culture *upwards* rather than *downwards*: textbooks can be used in the making of poetry, but not all textbooks are poems. Her idea of democratic taste involves the transfiguration of the familiar into the extraordinary rather than the dilution of the exceptional into the commonplace.

In the dialectical twists and turns of "Poetry," Moore broaches many of the same questions about democracy and aesthetic taste raised by the essays of Henry James. At the heart of his inquiry into the effects of democratic culture lay this fundamental question: does democratic respect for the equality of other persons require us to respect all works of art as equals? We know that Moore pondered such questions through her reading of Henry James during 1913-1920, but she had also faced this issue as early as her college years. Sometime before May 1909 Moore read G. Lowes Dickinson's *Justice and Liberty,* which argued that a system of social equality did not eliminate a need for excellence or the promotion of those with extraordinary gifts to positions of power.[11] Dickinson writes:

> [In a democracy] there would be different functions, but not different classes, still less castes. Above all, there would be no governing class, though there might be trained officials. So far as possible all citizens would receive an equally high standard of education, and be competent to perform equally high functions. In any case, difference of capacity would not involve difference of social rank; and the principle of the society would be a co-ordination of equals rather than a subordination of unequals. Democracy, in a word, would establish equality of status without identity of function, and popular control without confusion of standards. (25-26)

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Dickinson imagines a society where every citizen is "competent to perform" in many different social roles regardless of "social rank." Nevertheless, he assumes that citizens with a distinctive talent—an inspiring political organizer, a brave military general, a brilliant scientist, or a shrewd businessman—would be allowed to flourish in their particular field of expertise. Society would be based on "popular control" among a "co-ordination of equals" while sill allowing "difference[s] of capacity" to create new "standards" of excellence.

The final stanzas of "Poetry" arrive at something like Dickinson's view of equality with respect to the social value of poetry. Moore suggests that poetry thrives on the energy of evaluation—the process by which we determine which poets are "genuine" and which are "half-poets." For Moore, cultivating an individual taste is the very essence of becoming a coherent self; it buttresses our respect for the inherent moral equality of other human beings—for those with tastes different from, and yet just as real as our own. Each person's distinctive preferences stand in a relation of relative equality to one another insofar as each has a natural endowment for aesthetic judgment. At the same time, Moore does not deny that some judgments carry more authority than others, and they do so by virtue of their interpretive vividness, accuracy, or rhetorical persuasiveness. From this angle, the distinguishing traits of artistic quality need not be sacrificed to the homogenizing tendencies of political equality; the two stand in fruitful tension with one another. Personal taste invigorates the ideals of equality and pluralism at the heart of a robust democratic culture.

The final two stanzas of "Poetry" draw out the social implications of Moore's position in more explicit detail: "nor till the autocrats among us can be / 'literalists of / the imagination'—above / insolence and triviality and can present / for inspection, imaginary gardens with real toads in them, shall we have / it." The process of acquiring a taste for genuine poetry is here transfigured into a scene of political theater, as if we had been asked to attend a trial with key witnesses and the inspection of evidence. From the point of view of a democratic society, the mandarin who regards his taste in poetry as the token of a privileged status is not finally so different from the autocratic dictator who places every state policy under his direct supervision. In each case, a hierarchy is established—between the artist and the uncomprehending public, between the ruler and his powerless followers—that does not need to exist. And in each case, the poem suggests, the remedy remains the same: the "literalists of the

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imagination" must present for inspection "imaginary gardens with real toads in them." These provocative phrases set up an opposition between the "imaginary" and the "real" or "literal." In doing so, Moore challenges her reader to ponder the ways that the literal includes the metaphorical, and the imaginary includes the real.[12] While the problems of a "half-poet" seem fairly unlike those of an autocrat, Moore links these types together on the basis of a common, flawed psychology: the ineffective poet and the despotic leader are both guilty of a failure to balance the far-reaching scope of fancy with a firm grasp of the facts. Both are guilty of a mode of egotism that underestimates the powerful consequences of the imagination for the lives of readers and citizens, which is why Moore places stress on the importance of "literalists" and "real toads."

Along with these paradoxical formulations, the final lines of "Poetry" cite two additional characteristics—a taste for the "raw" and the "genuine"—as a clue to whether "you are interested in poetry." Coming to accept "the raw material of poetry in / all its rawness" is a little like learning to make poetic use of business documents. It involves learning how to see the materials of everyday experience as the seeds of inspiration. And it is only by noticing the potential of "the raw" that the reader comes to know "the genuine." Both of these adjectives point to the homely, unvarnished, and elemental mode of perception at the core of Moore's ideal of poetry. Throughout the poem, Moore has been at pains to argue that the ordinary is the secret of the extraordinary. In our encounter with this final conjunction of "the raw" and "the genuine," the reader finds Moore striving to hold quality and equality in a single thought.

Revisions of "Poetry," 1919–1925

While "Poetry" is Marianne Moore's most famous poem, it is also her most famously unstable poem, one that went through numerous revisions between 1919 and 1967. The early stages of the poem's textual history have an important bearing upon my interpretation of its democratic argument as well as my view of Moore's poetic career.[13] In the late fall of 1924, as she revised "Poetry" for publication in *Observations*, her first authorized collection of poems, Moore made a significant change to the syllabic organization of the poem, as well as a crucial change to the poem's final lines, substituting the phrase "the poets among us" for "the autocrats among us" (*Becoming* 207). In doing so, Moore softened the

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strident political language of the original version, first published in *Others* in 1919. The concluding sentence of that early version begins as follows: "In the meantime, if you demand on one hand, / in defiance of their opinion— / the raw material of poetry." In the 1919 version of "Poetry," Moore actively counsels the reader to adopt a stance of defiance towards authoritarian rulers—the pronoun "their" refers back to the opinion of "autocrats" mentioned several lines prior. In the 1924 version, however, Moore omits the clause "in defiance of their opinion," restricting her argument to the more rarified domain of literary discourse. This account of the nature of poetry no longer insists on a direct relation to modern systems of political power.[14] By altering the target of accusation from other people ("autocrats") to the speaker herself ("poets"), the 1924 version reinforces the self-condemning irony of the poem's opening lines ("I, too, dislike it"). In doing so, the 1924 revision achieves a more consistent tone—a lyric speaker who begins and ends the poem in an ironic posture of self-mockery—but it compromises the political resonance of the original conclusion. As Moore herself writes in the middle of the poem, "the result is not poetry"; in some sense, we might add, the result is not "Poetry." Still, omitting a clause and substituting a single word are relatively minor changes compared to the radical cuts later made by Moore—the text of the 1967 version of "Poetry," for example, is a mere three lines long. The 1924 version has some telling nuances of tone and important shifts of emphasis, but the core commitments of the poem do not radically depart from the version of 1919. In both cases, "Poetry" continues to pursue a dialectical argument about the function of poetic taste in a democracy. The 1924 version simply makes a stronger effort to temper the strident anti-authoritarian stance presented in the version of 1919.

A few months after *Observations* was published in December 1924, Moore did something very odd: she decided to cut "Poetry" from twenty-nine lines down to thirteen, and to abandon the use of syllabics for an open, free verse structure. Many of the lines from stanzas one, four, and five were severely compressed or omitted altogether. Moore printed the following version of "Poetry" in the second edition of *Observations*, first published in March 1925:

> I, too, dislike it:
> there are things that are important beyond all this fiddle.
> The bat, upside down; the elephant pushing,

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a tireless wolf under a tree,
the base-ball fan, the statistician—
"business documents and school-books"—
these phenomena are pleasing,
but when they have been fashioned
into that which is unknowable,
we are not entertained.
It may be said of all of us
that we do not admire what we cannot understand;
enigmas are not poetry. (*Becoming* 207)

The 1925 version radically departs from the nuanced and modulated language of its predecessors; the rhetoric here is more assertive and straightforward. This version eliminates much of the rhetorical drama that unfolds between the speaker and her skeptical audience in the earlier versions. The central subject of the poem changes significantly: instead of working through the relationship of equality to aesthetic *evaluation,* the poem now focuses on matters of aesthetic *epistemology*. Poetry is no longer defined by its association with the "raw" and the "genuine"; it is now characterized by its avoidance of "enigmas" and the "unknowable." In the 1925 version, Moore leaves out any reference to the difference between poets and "half-poets." She thus avoids the thorny topic of literary distinction as well as the implication that the speaker of this poem is qualified to judge such matters. Instead, Moore organizes her poem around the much less controversial idea that poetry should strive to be intelligible. Manuscripts of the 1925 "Poetry" confirm that Moore deliberately chose to avoid the topic of aesthetic judgment in this version. As Bonnie Honigsblum has documented, a manuscript of the thirteen-line version of "Poetry" originally included the phrase "that which is unknowable, or trivial, or glib" (206). In the version printed in the second edition of *Observations,* Moore retained "unknowable" but omitted "trivial" and "glib," adjectives that possess a strongly evaluative flavor and express disapproval. By eliminating these words, the 1925 version of "Poetry" focuses its argument against poetic obscurity in the name of a reader's right to be "entertained." Unlike the versions of 1919 or 1924, the 1925 version evades the crucial problem of evaluation and the place of intellectual distinction in an egalitarian society.

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What led Moore to make such a radical change to the text and the argument of "Poetry" in the months between December 1924 and March 1925? She did so, I believe, out of a desire to respond to the very mixed critical reviews that attended the initial publication of *Observations*—a spate of reviews that called into question Moore's commitment to a democratic idea of poetry. What is most striking about these reviews is their general agreement about Moore's difficult and obscure style, even when they differ about Moore's value as a poet. In his assessment of *Observations,* the modernist critic and novelist Glenway Wescott praised Moore's artistry and ingenuity, comparing her mental curiosity to John Dewey and her circuitous poems to the knotted texture of Francis Bacon's essays. Yet Wescott concluded his review of *Observations* with the following warning: "Miss Moore . . . is sometimes even more difficult to read than [Proust and Joyce]. In spite of the 'neatness of finish'—sometimes because of it, when repetitions or awkward appositions, needful for clarity, are omitted—one sentence or phrase obscures the meaning of another, and image within image obscures the subject of both" (52). Even though he praises Moore's originality and brilliance of imagination elsewhere in the review, Wescott nonetheless communicates his frustration with Moore's lack of "clarity." Wescott's review appeared in the *Dial* in January 1925; in the same issue, Moore's friend, the *Dial* editor Scofield Thayer, announced that she had won the 1924 *Dial* Award for Literature, one of the most famous poetry prizes of the modernist period. (Moore's friend T. S. Eliot had won the award in 1922 after the publication of *The Waste Land.*) Like Wescott, Thayer celebrated Moore's poetic achievement in terms that emphasized her complexity and formidable difficulty. The *Dial* Award, he explained, existed to fulfill "the function of discrimination between the one and the so very, very—the so very lamentably many" (53). It was unfortunate, Thayer argued, that the national literary public had so little appreciation of "America's most distinguished poetess" since the death of Emily Dickinson: "on the one hand the work of Miss Moore is itself of so inordinate and of so patent of value; . . . on the other hand it has hitherto remained, among the unfortunate American public, so meagerly relished and so signally unacclaimed." From Thayer's perspective, Moore was too sophisticated for the average American consumer. She thus deserved public recognition from those readers and critics with the sensitivity and training to appreciate her work and evaluate her accomplishment. In order to validate his view of Moore, Thayer cited no less an authority on

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elite culture than T. S. Eliot, who expressed "the consensus of opinion of those qualified to judge" in ranking Moore "among the half-dozen most 'exciting' contemporary European and American poets" (53).

The reviews of Wescott and Thayer both intended to praise Moore publicly and to boost her reputation in contemporary literary circles. But I suspect that Moore read these reviews with some degree of frustration and disappointment. Both reviewers make the assumption that American democracy is inhospitable to cultivated poetry like Moore's, a view that Moore had directly challenged in poems like "The Labours of Hercules" and "Poetry," featured in *Observations*. In this respect, Moore's admirers succeeded no better than her detractors in understanding the nature of her argument about democratic taste in her first published volume of poetry.

Other reviewers of *Observations* were much less forgiving towards the political implications of Moore's style. In a review for *The Nation* on March 18, 1925, Edwin Seaver contrasted the subtlety of Moore's irony to "the commonplace and the easy" (297). While he admires her originality, Seaver finds that the "involute style" and "wayward, capricious expression" on display in *Observations* leaves Moore open to the "charge of obscurity" (297-98). It seems obvious to Seaver that Moore's style of writing has antidemocratic implications. Her "modernist" tendencies are "austerely conservative" (297), he writes, and completely at odds with the homely, down home manners of average American citizens: "Miss Moore hews to an ideology that is aristocratic and severe and pure."

Seaver's review, which takes a line from "Poetry" as its title ("A Literalist of the Imagination"), came out towards the end of March 1925. Given this date, it may have appeared too late to influence Moore's revision of "Poetry" for the second edition of *Observations*. But Seaver's characterization of Moore as antidemocratic and elitist had already been anticipated by Herbert Gorman, whose review in the February 1, 1925 edition of *The New York Times Book Review* bore an alarming title with strong political overtones: "Miss Moore's Art Is Not a Democratic One." Like Seaver, Gorman drew a connection between Moore's urbane, intellectual style and her undemocratic political allegiances. He writes that Moore "exhibits a keen, restless yet urbane, scalpel-like intelligence that is quite undismayed in the face of difficulty"; such a mind, he continues, leads her to produce "sharp, intellectually compact, aristocratic work." The compression and sinuous intelligence of Moore's poetry will neces-

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sarily limit the appeal of her work in Gorman's view. She may be capable of attracting connoisseurs and devotees, but the masses will never enjoy Moore's poetry. Gorman concludes: "Her art is not a democratic art in any sense of the word" (np).

What is most interesting about Seaver's and Gorman's reviews is not their speculation about the small size of Moore's readership, which they correctly perceived as limited to those with the patience and training to enjoy her unique brand of modernism. Rather, what is most striking is that both critics assume a natural connection between Moore's difficult, modernist style, a coterie of avant-garde readers, and the poet's hostility to democratic beliefs and values. This constellation of assumptions is precisely what Moore seeks to challenge in a work like "Poetry." From the evidence of these reviews—all of which make some reference to "Poetry"—we must conclude that both her admirers and detractors misunderstood the main thrust of Moore's argument about democratic taste when her first book of poems was published.

One way that Moore responded to the negative reviews of *Observations* was by shortening "Poetry" to thirteen lines, eliminating its original syllabic organization, and focusing her argument upon achieving clarity. Paradoxically, the 1925 version constitutes an overt refutation of the charge of obscurity, as if Moore hoped to show that her art could be "democratic" in the conventional sense of accessible and plain-spoken, even as this revision diminishes the rigor and nuance of her original argument about democratic taste. After the reviews appeared, Moore became so concerned with avoiding the characterization of "snobbish" and "undemocratic" that she betrayed the complexity of her original design, settling on a simpler, more digestible, and more approachable argument in the 1925 "Poetry." It is no small irony that Moore ended up enacting the process of simplification that the original version of her poem sets out to challenge. The desire to answer recent critics proved too strong, and Moore revised "Poetry" so that it would communicate quickly and effectively, scaling back the complex qualifications of earlier versions of the poem, but allowing her to satisfy her original desire to be perceived as committed to a democratic mode of writing.

The subsequent textual history of "Poetry" shows that this too was a passing mood. In 1929 Moore would allow Conrad Aiken to reprint the thirty-line version of "Poetry" (1919), not the thirteen-line version (1925) for publication in an anthology. In 1932 she reprinted a fifteen-line vari-

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ant of "Poetry," but this version returns to the poem's original argument. She chose to omit the lines about epistemology ("that which is unknowable"), and to reinstate the importance of aesthetic judgment ("dragged into conscious oddity by half poets, the result is not poetry"). In 1935, when T. S. Eliot helped Moore to edit an edition of her *Selected Poems*, she again reprinted the twenty-nine-line version of "Poetry" (1924) with a few minor changes. Excluding anthologies, Moore reprinted the twenty-nine-line version of "Poetry" in additional editions of her poetry from 1934-1967. While there is no such thing as a final, authoritative version, the twenty-nine-line version is the one she preferred most consistently throughout her life.[15]

In the heat of the moment in 1925, however, Moore could not resist responding to those critics who characterized her art as undemocratic. With the publication of a revised "Poetry" in the second edition of *Observations,* Moore put herself in a better position to avoid future charges of obscurity. She firmly aligned her work with "what we can understand" in opposition to "enigmas" and "that which is unknowable." The 1925 version of "Poetry" thus stands as testimony to the difficulty of articulating a sophisticated model of democratic taste in an American context that equates democratic literature with consumption by the masses, the language of the vernacular, and the ability to be understood immediately without reflection.

Analogies and anecdotes: Moore among the democrats

Earlier in this essay I hinted that Marianne Moore's early poetry looked forward to Lionel Trilling's way of talking about literature and politics in *The Liberal Imagination*. Trilling defined his critical project as an investigation of "the politics of culture, the organization of human life toward some end or other, toward the modification of sentiments, which is to say the quality of human life" (xi). It turns out that the resemblance between Moore and Trilling was not entirely coincidental. In a review of an anthology of Walt Whitman's poetry published towards the end World War II, Trilling cited Moore's example when discussing the relationship between democracy and literature. Along with Whitman, he explained, Marianne Moore recognized "that literature must deal with 'the people'" without assuming that the imagination performed "its proper work by

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dealing directly with politics or by exposing social conditions" ("Sermon" 209-10). Like Whitman, he suggests, Moore understood that a poet "works by 'analogies,' by 'curious removes, indirections.'" On this understanding of the task of the democratic poet, Moore succeeds above most of her contemporaries: "In the face of the common belief that Whitman is the ancestor of the social realists," Trilling concludes that "Marianne Moore, much more than Carl Sandburg, is his true descendent." Trilling's perspective was shaped by his negative appraisal of the propagandistic uses of documentary realism in the Depression era and the rabid nationalism of wartime America. As such, he implicitly contrasts Moore with those of her contemporaries who seem to have abandoned the indirections of modernism for a more direct form of political engagement. While we need not accept Trilling's simplistic contrast between modernism and social realism—these literary movements were never as distinct they were made to seem by later critics—his comments offer a salutary reminder of the perils of extracting a writer's politics from the surfaces of style. Trilling stands against those who would accuse an author of being unprogressive by virtue of the sophistication of her poetry or the limited size of her audience. In particular, he counsels his wartime readers to remain alert to the possible *rapprochement* between the most advanced experiments in art and those experiments in living that constitute the democratic way of life: "What seems now to mark our ultimate political hope is a willingness to give up all concern with the internal *quality* of the simple separate person and an unwillingness to believe that the adventurous expressions of art have an intimate relation to the adventure of political freedom" (215).

While Trilling's argument is not biographically accurate—Moore had a strong aversion to Whitman's manners, if not the style of his poetry—he recognized a political tendency in her work that quite a few of her subsequent readers have hinted at over the years.[16] Some of Moore's closest friends pointed out the affinities between her work and those who wrote more explicitly about political democracy. In the course of an interview in 1966, Elizabeth Bishop felt compelled to characterize John Dewey by way of a comparison with her friend Marianne Moore:

> Even at the age of eighty-five he missed no detail. He and Marianne Moore are the only people I have ever known who would talk to everyone, on all social levels, without the slightest change in their manner of speaking. I think this shows something important about Dewey and Marianne Moore—they have the

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> kind of instinctive respect for other people which we all wish we could have but can only aspire to. No matter how foolish your question, he would always give you a complete and tactful answer. He loved little things, small plants and weeds and animals, and of course he was very generous in dealing with people. (Molesworth xx)

Bishop's terms of comparison are revealing: she speaks of their *instinctive* respect for other people, as if to point to something native that we others gain only by prolonged study or training. For Bishop, Moore and Dewey possess a feeling for human equality as a guiding motive of their disposition. They are so deeply at home in their democratic convictions that they can "talk to everyone, on all social levels" without adjusting their tone of voice or employing an affected idiom.

Bishop was not the only friend to suggest that Moore's personality was guided by democratic instincts. In 1962, her friend Lester Litchfield wrote to Moore to insist, "know it or not, like or not," that Whitman was her literary grandfather (Molesworth 410). A similar intuition about Moore's egalitarian leanings has also shaped the assessments of her work by recent critics. "From a viewpoint to do with social class," writes Robert Pinsky, "a strong drama of Moore's work is her effort to accommodate democracy, her egalitarian and patriotic side, with what seems the unavoidable gentility of her language" (20). In the eyes of Sandra Gilbert, Moore disdains "the arrogance that is the consequence of hierarchy" (109), including the hierarchies of power implicit in colonialism. In poems like "Virginia Britannia," she argues, Moore reveals "a voice against certain kinds of domination" (111). As Gilbert rightly emphasizes, Moore's poems do not reverse hierarchies so much as refuse the idea of hierarchy altogether. David Bromwich has also characterized Moore's thinking as democratic by pointing to Moore's canny use of quotations. Moore's practice is very different from a poet like Ezra Pound, he writes, since Pound "doesn't want the reader to know everything he knows. There is a distinctly authoritative relationship between him and the knowledge which he connects superstitiously with the sources he's citing" (120-21). Moore, by contrast, leaves "her tracks . . . in the open," which suggests a "a more democratic attitude in that old-fashioned, early-Dewey spirit of democracy" (121).

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While it would be a mistake to press these comparisons too far, it is striking how many of Moore's readers over the years have felt compelled to make parallels between her poems and better-known democratic writers like Whitman and Dewey. One purpose of this essay has been to suggest that these characterizations of Moore are not simply impressionistic or anecdotal, but actually stand at the core of Moore's early writing and thinking. As such, Moore's example offers an intriguing alternative to one of the commonplaces of contemporary literary studies—that the habits of aesthetic evaluation walk hand in hand with the antidemocratic sentiments of a cultural elite. "One must make a distinction, however": when asked to choose between the difficult poems of modernism and the leveling tendencies of democratic politics, Moore invites us to be more discriminating in how we define the relationship of political equality to the cultivation of aesthetic taste.

Notes

1. See Bourdieu's *Distinction* and *The Rules of Art*.

2. See Guillory, *Cultural Capital*; English, *The Economy of Prestige*; and McGurl, *The Program Era*.

3. I owe this clarification about Moore's college major to Professor Linda Leavell.

4. The Bryn Mawr course catalogue is quoted in Anderson, "Tricorn Hat" 32.

5. See Marianne Moore, student essays, VII: 12: 06 (Spring 1909). Lines that are struck out reflect editorial markings in the original.

6. Moore's reading notebooks during these years feature numerous references to British literary journals such as *The Spectator, The New Statesmen, The Fortnightly Review,* and *The Athenaeum*. James's essay was first published as "The Younger Generation" on March 19 and April 2, 1914 in the *Times Literary Supplement*. It is reprinted in his *Literary Criticism* 123-54.

7. Because my argument depends on a biographical reading of Moore's career, I have relied on the earliest published version of "The Labors of Hercules."

8. While it is true that Moore often attacked the "merely" subjective, seeing it as a sign of egotism and self-involvement, the personal basis of Moore's writing has been overlooked in recent surveys of twentieth-century poetry, such as Altieri's. On the whole, I remain largely sympathetic to Altieri's view of modernist poetry as a constructivist enterprise.

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9. Compare Moore's poem to William James in "The Will to Believe": "We ought . . . delicately and profoundly to respect one another's mental freedom—then only shall we bring about the intellectual republic; then only shall we have that spirit of inner tolerance without which all our outer tolerance is soulless" (478).

10. Moore became friends with Burke at an early stage of her career. She first met Burke in New York City in the early 1920s and they worked together professionally at *The Dial,* where Burke briefly served as Moore's assistant in 1925.

11. On May 2, 1909, Moore writes that she went to hear Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson lecture on "Ideals of Democracy" before confessing that "[she] didn't learn a thing beyond what is in his book" (*Selected Letters* 69). The book to which she refers is almost certainly Dickinson's *Justice and Liberty,* first published in 1908.

12. In 1918, a year before "Poetry" was first published, Moore elaborated on the way that the real inheres in the imaginative in a review of the poems of Jean de Bosschère:

> This Frenchman, like certain modern poetry of our own language, sees the characteristics, as of individual life, which lurk in inanimate objects and even in situations, as well as in living beings. He feels what might be called the soul of these. This form of vision is perhaps mysticism, but it is entirely apart from, though not contradictory to, theological mysticism. To one with a developed sensitiveness this form of individuality is a thing as real—in this world of illusions—as material appearances are. (*Complete Prose* 36)

13. As many critics have discussed, Moore's politics became somewhat more conservative after the onset of the Great Depression. For a detailed discussion of Moore's political confusions in the 1930s, at times siding with Hoover and at other times corresponding with Burke about her support of economic socialism, see Carson. At times, Carson underestimates how many other former Progressive Era reformers also sided with Hoover in these years. I do not think Moore was a stereotypical conservative in the early 1930s, nor do I see her thought as significantly shaped by the ideology of classical republicanism. But I agree with Carson that the early 1930s is a key turning point in Moore's political evolution, in which she began to employ explicitly moral criteria in her evaluation of public life.

14. This revision thus shows Moore's growing discomfort with comparing poets to autocrats, or politicians more generally. For a similar perspective on Moore's resistance to hierarchy and overweening authority, especially in relation to gender, see Miller 64–65.

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15. For the textual history of "Poetry," see Honigsblum and Peterson.

16. In her reading notebook from 1915 (1250/1), Moore makes this rather obscure distinction between Whitman's "morals" and his "decency":

> Whitman's morals are in all respects admirably clean—but of decency[,] and Whitman's indecencies seem to me [as] pointless and inane as those of a drunken sailor in a Limehouse bar. Even in the Song of the Open Road one gets this connection of the domination of mind by matter which is to my [mind] The Supreme Horror.

It is clear from this passage that Moore disapproves of Whitman's character, though it is less obvious what she thinks of him as a stylist.

§

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Reviews

Atavistic Tendencies: The Culture of Science in American Modernity

by Dana Seitler
Minnesota University Press, 2008. 328 pages

Carrie Rohman

Dana Seitler's discussion of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century science, fiction, and photography in *Atavistic Tendencies: The Culture of Science in American Modernity* draws from a broad range of theoretical sources including Foucault, Benjamin, Deleuze and Guattari, and Bataille among others. Seitler is primarily interested in the ways that scientific knowledge circulates in American modernism, and examines phenomena such as criminal morphologies and eugenic discourses to unpack the trajectories through which science and scientific technologies are formed and disseminated culturally. Her theoretical claims are wide-ranging; I will follow some of the book's primary threads to trace the way she understands atavistic theory in American modernism.

Seitler begins her investigations by returning us to one of Freud's most classic cases, Sergei Pankejeff, otherwise known as the Wolf Man. In discussing Freud, Seitler suggests that residual animality "enacts" the condition of atavism as a "return not *to* but *of* the past" (33). The Wolf Man case functions as an introduction to the image of being down on all fours, and this image in turn acts as a kind of ur-trope throughout the book as a whole. The Wolf Man's case famously led Freud to hazard that Pankejeff's parents were witnessed "having sex from behind," and Seitler discusses the "becoming animal" of the parents as allowing Freud to articulate a connection between sexuality and animality as "one of psychoanalysis's most operative metaphors" (38). Among a number of insightful considerations of Freudianism we find Seitler's discussion of instinct, a quality revealing a self that is "constituted and pushed forward by its own compulsive urge to restore the past" (45). This configuration allows Seitler to suggest that "if all instincts are atavistic, then the Freudian subject is itself an atavism" (45). Her first chapter goes on to theorize

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the role of the visual in the psychoanalytic process by emphasizing how dreams, scenes, and traumas are rendered as images throughout the proceedings of a case study. The idea here is that language provides a way to "see" in the therapeutic environs. By the chapter's end, Seitler is able to make the claim that since the photographic image records and transmits events through time, just as the unconscious mind can do, then "modern subjectivity is like modern technology" (54).

Seitler's chapter "Late Modern Morphologies" examines in further detail the specific role of photography in rendering knowledge of atavism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, primarily in medical and anthropological discourses. Because photography is more "purely" visual than language, Seitler argues, this "technology of the photograph can be seen as another powerful device that many scientists believed granted access to the human subject" (57). In addition to providing visual "evidence" of retrogressive qualities that were receiving a great deal of attention in theories of degeneracy at this time, photographs of deviant morphologies both expanded "categories of deviance"—that is new forms of the regressively abnormal—*and* expanded "categories of the visible body, creating new ways for people to *look*" (74). Seitler emphasizes in this section the peculiar state of atavism as a "living embodiment," a "material, corporeal recurrence of the past" (66–67). She also explains that atavism disrupts the traditional notion of modernity as a period of time characterized by progression. Finally, she discusses how photographic depictions of atavism elicit linguistic accounts to sharpen themselves and bring into being their fullest meaning.

In her third chapter, Seitler turns to the literary text to more fully flesh out the ways in which writers translate visual notions of atavism back into linguistic representations of such questions. Here she introduces her notion of the "degeneration narrative" or the "regressive 'story'" in which "the body is produced as an ekphrasis of sexual perversion" (95). Frank Norris's *Vandover and the Brute* (1895) serves as her first example. The trope of becoming-dog, manifesting itself through the all-fours pose and the protagonist's snarling, barking vocalizations, emerges immediately as the mark of perversity in Seitler's reading. But she goes on to explain that her view of Norris's text moves beyond a naturalist or decadent reading, "recasting the homosexual dandy as the atavistic brute, thus shifting its terms from a case of 'style' to a biological condition and offering" (104). Seitler contends that Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* (1937) should be read in a

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similar vein, focusing on Robin's perversion and "decline to a lower order of humanity" (116), and she herself reads all the characters in Barnes's text as "sexual subjects in a state of bestial devolution" (121). I will discuss this reading of Barnes further toward the end of my review.

Her next chapter, "Atavistic Time," reads popular serial dime novels from the first half of the twentieth century in America as not only enacting the concept of "modern time as something progressive and progressing" but as also embedding the ways that nationalist and racialist anxieties are overlaid with evolutionary ones in a post-Darwinian context. For Seitler, Tarzan is a national superhero who signals the longing to bolster white, masculine potency through "the display of human mastery over nature" (171). In a complementary fashion, Fu Manchu as a cultural "supervillain . . . indexes the ways in which human science rerouted anxieties of national decay onto the body of the racial other" (171). One of the qualities that links these series is their understanding of the past as something not inert but rather active, something that impinges upon the present and upon modern cultures.

In a kind of response to her own discussion of the "degeneration narrative," Seitler's fifth chapter considers Charlotte Perkins Gilman as a producer of the "regeneration narrative" which "acts as a curative to the ailing and atavistic body" (179). But lest her analysis here seem too utopian, Seitler is keen to point out that her recuperation of certain underanalyzed works such as Gilman's *The Crux* (1911) comes with specific critical discomforts: namely, the prominence of eugenic theory in such "feminist" works. In this fascinating section, Seitler examines the ways that Gilman's regeneration narratives proffer a model of "white, middle-class motherhood" as the route to social improvement (180). "Eugenic Feminism" is a rubric through which we understand figures like Gilman as desiring "progressive" conditions for women in part so that they can reproduce offspring outside of heterosexual marriage but within "eugenic unions" that are "the origins of a fit and vigorous national identity" (187). In this way, a complex feminist position emerges through which changing patriarchal structures insist upon valuing biological motherhood, placing women at the forefront of national advancement, and "corroborating the racialist impulses of national-patriarchal discourses" (189). In sum, "the mother's body emerged as atavisms's counterpoint and thus as a location for the progressivist future" in this literary and cultural moment (197).

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Seitler's final chapter, "An Atavistic Embrace," includes a reading of the character Yank in O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape* that delineates the various ways that Yank's association with a gorilla comes to figure cultural antagonisms of the period. In addition to the more obvious (albeit still important) issues of class and race, Seitler points out the ways in which the image of the beast or the Neanderthal often serves as a counterpoint to the technological system or function in modernity. In this way, the juxtaposition of animal and machine "follows a Marxian understanding of the uneven development of capital: for progress to exist as a temporal cutting edge, it requires a primitive outside, a constitutive precapitalist space that allows for the production and reproduction of the modern" (205). The animal "embraces" that Seitler follows (including those in Jack London's *The Sea-Wolf*) are essentially exposed as moments that disallow such distinctions as self and other, nature and culture. Seitler's larger point here is that these "ruptures" reveal the idea of the modern, so dependent on various binaries, to be a feint or ruse.

The most striking thing about Seitler's book is its place among recent investigations into the question of time and the timely. Reading the first few chapters, one is reminded of Elizabeth Grosz's recent work on such questions. Consider, for instance, one of Grosz's evaluations of Nietzsche and temporality: "He invents a time that is dynamized, active, unpredictable, a time that does not forget the past but does not find itself constrained to its terms, for the future has a past inherent in it as it veers away from its own causal predictabilities" (114).[1] These resonances are not accidental: Seitler in fact refers to Grosz at several points. But while Grosz, in her book *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution, and the Untimely*, concerns herself to a large extent with the question of futurity and the new, Seitler's interests rest more specifically with the past, and, as she puts it, with "the continued presence of the past in the present" (6). Atavism, the irruption of the past in present-day bodies, is for Seitler compelling because of the way it disallows traditional notions of teleological time, and also because of the way it manifests or, perhaps more to the point, embodies the paradoxes of modernity as an episteme. Regarding time, Seitler emphasizes the disruptive nature of the atavistic:

> In particular, atavism offers up a notion of time as multidirectional and of the body as polytemporal. Indeed, atavism can be said to suspend the narrative of modern time as a continuous forward

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> movement in which one event is thought to succeed and supersede another. Instead, it brazenly pushes the past onto the present, materializing the pressing force of history on our lives. (7)

Seitler makes such temporal complications clear, among other places, in her discussion of the Tarzan series, which "continuously reminds us of what threatens the modernity of the future, of what came before M-A-N (according to Burroughs's pop-evolutionary concerns), and of where we may also potentially go if the hybridity of Tarzan's body is allowed to roam unchecked: back in human time" (149).

About modernity itself, Seitler makes the discerning claim, citing Latour's theorization of the chronological "ruptures" modernity poses and the concomitant proliferation of hybridity within modernity, that atavism represents a taxonomic break that paradoxically gives the lie to itself. Modernity understands itself as "new," as making a historical or ideological break with the past, and atavism provides a fascinating instantiation of this belief. Latour has explained that the "modern" depends upon the idea of absolute boundaries that carries within itself the interimbrication of opposites and the concomitant recurrence of polluted or monstrous mixtures. For Seitler, the atavistic body is "exemplary" of this complicated and compromised "sense of a break between the past and the present" (16). She argues that the production of the atavistic body as a "knowable site" helps in "enunciating the disciplinary organization that enables the modern to be understood as distinct and distinguishable" at the same time that it reveals a synthesis of "temporalities or personhoods that should, at least ideologically, remain discrete" (17). One of the most useful of Seitler's claims, then, becomes her reading of atavism as the "constitutive anachronism at the root of modern selfhood, materializing what could otherwise be understood as the metaphysical questions posed by the modern—questions of loss and presence, obsolescence and repetition, the archaic and the new" (20). It is here that Seitler's work can most usefully be applied to other elements of modernism and modernity's literary and cultural landscapes to explicate how atavism functions within such slippages.

Seitler's chapters on the photographic image and on eugenic feminism provide important readings of visuality and gender as they help produce biological protocols and concepts of deviance in the human sciences during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In one

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of many Foucauldian turns, Seitler points out the irony of photographic representations of the atavistic body that over-produce what they "had intended to control: atavistic bodies everywhere" (82). The visual did not result in some accessible realization of the human body, as Seitler explains, so much as it helped to shape a "codified set of meanings" that required narrative intervention to guide the viewer toward specific conclusions (92). Thus the "image-text" plays a key role in identifying the deviant and atavistic (83).

Seitler also identifies regenerative concepts in the work of Charlotte Perkins Gilman that function as a kind of rejoinder to the threat of degeneration atavism carries. (I will return to this question in a moment.) Her discussion of Gilman's work and feminist eugenics is particularly clear in its elucidation of the way that Gilman reframes female desire through heterosexual reproduction in an effort to make women's biological work central to social progress. Seitler importantly discusses Gilman's "answer" to fears of degeneration in ways that bring new understanding to Gilman's body of work and to our views of eugenic theory in the period.

Another strength of Seitler's argument is her use of Merleau-Ponty to discuss corporeality and subjectivity extending between human and non-human entities. Merleau-Ponty's work, and his concept of "intercorporeality," remain underrepresented in much recent theoretical exploration of humanism's "others." Seitler's treatment of his philosophical perspective works as a corrective in that regard. She also provides some interesting links between capitalism and evolution, for instance in her discussion of Jack London's work.

One limitation of Seitler's book is her reading of Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* as a "degeneration" narrative, an interpretation that my own recent work on modernism and animality counters.[2] Seitler claims that Norris's *Vandover* and Barnes's *Nightwood* "are both in a suggestively similar conversation with the dehumanizing effects of modernization: both take on the aura and the atmosphere of modern decay, and both express perversity through the corporeal ruination of the human" (115). While Seitler's discussion acknowledges Barnes's ambiguity at a number of points, her focus on Robin Vote's "decline" misses the mark just as countless earlier readings of Robin as pathological have done. In fact, *Nightwood* does not so much render a world "in a state of ruination" (*Atavistic Tendencies* 117) as it reveals Robin's lack of the abjection of animality to be the only ontologically full position, a position that is rigorously

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posthuman. Indeed, it is the other characters' desire for phallic identity and the conventionally "human" that Barnes's extraordinarily complex narrative renders pathological. It is thus more accurate to read *Nightwood* as a text that proffers a profound critique of degeneration theory and its relationship to humanism.

More generally, readers of Seitler's book will find an at times perplexing omission of recent theoretical and ethical work in critical animal studies, an omission that results in certain limitations in her argument. I want to be clear that Seitler does often address the question of the animal straight on, as in her sixth chapter on "the atavistic embrace." However, her readings frequently lack a rigorous theoretical parsing out of the species dynamic *as such* for which much of her material begs. The book's cover image, for instance, offers a figural drawing of what appears to be an ape's hand. It is not clear if this hand is human with atavistic qualities, or rather an ape hand that seems eerily humanesque. In either case, however, the use of such an image implies that the animal is especially central to the cultural phenomenon of atavism. The image is compelling on many fronts, not least of which is its relation to Heidegger's discussion of the hand, handiness, and the human, which has proven so central to recent animal theory.[3] The cover image thus sets up an expectation of attention to such concerns that is absent in the text itself.

We can see the effects of this omission in, for instance, Seitler's introduction, where she discusses the "liberal political frame . . . [in which] progressive political agendas [are] organized around the crucial attempts to obtain rights for those consistently treated as nonhuman" (52). Focusing on racialized and sexualized marginalization, Seitler does not make the logical leap to the question of the animal's ethical status in its specificity. While her readings do, in fact must, discuss animality within discourses of atavism to some degree, those discussions often remain distant from a deep philosophical and ethical investigation of the discourse of species. For instance, when discussing O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape*, Seitler mostly reads animality as "a supplement . . . [for] the mutually constitutive contructs of race and class that comprise Yank's laboring body" (212). While I do not disagree with Seitler's shrewd reading of race and class here, it is important to note that when Yank sees a display of monkey fur in a shop window in the play, the ethical dimensions of violence against nonhuman animals become so interimbricated with the discourses of class, race, and even gender, that the *monkey's body* also requires theoretical unpacking. Seitler's

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book would, I believe, benefit from an exploration of what I would call a double materialization at the heart of atavistic ideology as it circulates around the physical or bodily *and* the animal, two categories often associated with a fundamental materiality.

It has always been my hunch that American modernism projects the anxiety about animal "return" onto questions of race more thoroughly than British modernism (to the degree that we can make such a distinction within a transatlantic framework). In this regard Seitler sheds a good deal of light on a historically specific working through of post-Darwinian fears in American culture. Her focus on the temporal is particularly useful in examining the link between atavism and modernity itself. But while Seitler thus usefully privileges the question of time in her discussion of evolutionary "return," the theorization of animality within these American discourses of atavism will require more attention from the critical community.

Notes

1. See Elizabeth Grosz, p. 114.

2. See Carrie Rohman's study, specifically Chapter Five, which offers a detailed elucidation of language, animality and the posthuman in *Nightwood* that counters an interpretation of the text as a degeneration narrative.

3. See especially Cary Wolfe's discussion of the figure of the hand in Heidegger.

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Mourning, Melancholia, and Textual Scapegoating

Gender, Race, and Mourning in American Modernism
by Greg Forter
Cambridge University Press, 2011. 217 pages

Travis Rozier

Over the last fifty years or more, the critical discourse on modernism has worked largely under the assumption that the modernist authors who approach the losses of modernity in a melancholic fashion provide the greatest opportunity for a politically progressive response to these losses. This has in turn made a melancholic aesthetic almost a prerequisite for canonization, on the assumption that any attempt at mourning the losses of capitalist modernity betrays a capitulation to the sentimental while a melancholic approach keeps psychic wounds open and raw as a spur to political action. Scholars involved in the new modernist studies have recently challenged this position, however, arguing for an expanded modernist aesthetic capable of mourning for the losses occasioned by modernity. Greg Forter's *Gender, Race, and Mourning in American Modernism* makes several important interventions in this ongoing debate, broadening discussion on the meaning of social loss and both complicating and elaborating the critique of canonical melancholic modernism offered by new modernist scholarship.

Forter's short introduction addresses the notion that authors of melancholic modernism regretted, above all other losses, that of the masculinity threatened by the rise of the modern capitalist marketplace. Forter's argument complicates this well-trod critical discourse in several interesting ways. First, he suggests that the canonical authors on which he himself focuses suffer not only the loss of a nineteenth-century conception of masculinity, but also "the loss of its compassionate interior—its 'feminine' capacity for sympathetic identification and abrogation of the self's borders" (4). Forter contends that the loss of this feminine side of nineteenth-century masculinity was of great concern to these authors, as it was seen as the source of creative energies. This inflects the way in which these authors understood the ability to create as another casualty of modernity. Forter reads canonical modernism as a failed attempt to mourn

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this feminine, creative side of masculinity, arguing that authors' internalization of the stringent gender codes which registered any aspect of the feminine as unmanly and sentimental worked to block such mourning for a more flexible masculinity. He foregrounds this ambivalence toward the feminine—the opposed longing to reconnect with its creativity and imperative to guard one's masculinity from it—as the impetus behind a "literature of melancholic remembrance" (5) that perceives the reclamation of feminine energies as not merely daunting but impossible.

Forter's emphasis on the ambivalent nature of this loss leads him to the compelling argument that these attempts to mourn lost masculinity produce a melancholic aggression toward the feminine that canonical, modernist texts subsequently displace onto "the socially vulnerable: women, effeminate men, and racial minorities" (5). In an important move, Forter suggests that this displaced anger bears a racial component, arguing that these authors conflated the racial other and the lost femininity with which they sought to reconnect, turning to primitivism as a source of the creative energies they associate with the lost form of masculinity. Their attempt to access these qualities through the figure of the racial other, according to Forter, only resulted in further ambivalence as their works continually asserted that "the qualities embodied by the racial primitive were (for white people) not merely lost but ontologically inaccessible" (7). Hence their texts' attempts to reconnect with feminine energies through women and racial others only resulted in the displacement of melancholic aggression toward these figures in a process of "textual scapegoat[ing]" (6), a channeling of anger at loss away from the historical forces of modern capital and onto those vulnerable to blame. Lastly, Forter uses this formulation to level a persuasive critique against the dominant strand of mourning theory by noting that its privileging of a melancholic aesthetic elides the destructive aggression inherent in the melancholic response, an aggression which becomes displaced onto the feminine and, because of the racial politics Forter identifies, the racial other. He illustrates these points through readings of four canonical authors, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Faulkner, and Cather. These convincing readings employ biographical, historical, and textual analysis to reveal each text as a failed attempt to recall a lost fluidity in gender—a failure that ironically forecloses on possibilities of resistance, instead reinforcing a conservative white masculinity.

Forter's first chapter, "Gender, Melancholy, and the Whiteness of Impersonal Form in *The Great Gatsby*," begins with a succinct rehash

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of the critical history of mourning theory. Any scholar looking to familiarize herself with contemporary mourning theory and its political engagements would do well to read the first few pages of this chapter. This section concisely stakes out the political implications of the book in its critique of a poststructural melancholic response to collective loss that elides historical causation by assuming that loss and unfulfilled desire are inherent in subjectivity. Forter suggests that mourning theory has sought to revitalize melancholia as an effective political response to loss, working under the assumption that to successfully mourn an object is to acquiesce to its loss. He offers a compelling argument against this project by calling attention to some misapprehensions at work in its assumptions. Most importantly, he notes that the project to revitalize melancholia overlooks the negative symptoms of the melancholic, particularly displaced anger and self-loathing, and suggests that a better response would be "not to embrace melancholia but to defuse the melancholic's self-aggression by rechanneling aggression toward the social formations" (22). Returning to his primary argument, Forter notes that melancholic responses, far from being politically progressive, often serve conservative ends by displacing melancholic anger onto those who fall outside the circle of privileged, white masculinity.

In a persuasive reading of Fitzgerald's personal documents and letters, Forter renders the author as deeply ambivalent about his own place as an artist in the new, rigid gender binary. He figures *Gatsby* as Fitzgerald's attempt to work through these anxieties, arguing that Tom Buchanan represents "the *new* style of manhood" opposed to what Forter calls Gatsby's "*residual* masculinity" (28). While the novel seems to mourn Gatsby as a figure for a masculinity whose fluidity allows access to creative, self-making energies, Forter reveals Fitzgerald's ambivalence toward his title character. Fitzgerald's novel, he argues, conveys an increasing hostility toward Gatsby, largely through the admission that Gatsby puts his creative efforts to work in the interest of making himself appear more like Tom. Forter argues that the aggression produced by Fitzgerald's ambivalence toward Gatsby becomes fully melancholic as it is displaced from Gatsby onto Daisy, a move that commodifies the feminine and leaves Gatsby "*castrated* by the extent of her unavailability [and] the fact that he cannot afford her" (38). In a cogent reading of the final passage of the book, Forter shows how *Gatsby* works as a structurally melancholic response to loss in that it registers desire for the lost object as that which cannot be relinquished yet is forever deferred.

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The last section of the chapter addresses the racial component of *Gatsby*. Of all the novels that Forter discusses *Gatsby* is the least directly concerned with race, and he notes that while the novel tends to elide direct confrontation with the problem of whiteness, Gatsby's self-creation is "the transformation of the ethnic 'Gatz' into the ethnically unmarked 'Gatsby'" (44). Forter suggests that the invisible whiteness that Gatsby seeks becomes endangered by the very goal of this endeavor, his desire for Daisy. Gatsby's whiteness is complicated by the sexual nature of his desire, which is coded as racially impure. In the same vein, Daisy's idealization as a symbol of white southern womanhood is also compromised by her promiscuity. Thus Forter reads Gatsby's desire to attain white manhood as always already a failure because this desire serves to mark him as racially non-white. Forter uses this observation to segue into a discussion of the form of the novel, which he claims condemns the feminine and the racially other through Fitzgerald's "normative 'hardness' of masculine rigor and formal control," a feature that stylistically endorses "the aspirations to substancelessness" (49) associated with whiteness. Forter may have considered beginning his book with an analysis of a text that more directly confronts the racial tensions so important to his argument, as his reading of the racial anxieties at play in *Gatsby* seems a bit tangential. Subsequent chapters, however, work to buttress his connection between a lost access to femininity and the racial other.

In his second chapter, "Redeeming Violence in *The Sun Also Rises*: Phallic Embodiment, Primitive Ritual, Fetishistic Melancholia," Forter accords the racial component of modernist melancholia a more central role. He argues, as many others have before, that Hemingway seeks to obtain lost masculinity in the "primitive, 'premodern' community" (55) of Spain, which the novel locates in Spaniards' reverence toward bullfighting. Forter further suggests that the masculinity Hemingway finds in bullfighting represents not just masculine aggressiveness but also "the pacific power of primitive ritual: an art" (56). He thus contends that the sport works both as a counter to the feminizing effects of modernity, symbolized most obviously in Jake Barnes's literal castration, and as an expression of "*beneficently* feminine" artisanal creativity for which Hemingway, as a writer, yearns. Yet Forter argues that *The Sun* ultimately associates bullfighting with "death without *telos* or redemptive significance" (87), thereby revealing the primitive community as internally corrupt and insufficient for recovering lost masculinity. To this point, Forter's reading appears only to rearticulate ground well covered by Hemingway criticism. Yet, ever attentive to

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form, Forter offers an innovative reading of Hemingway's quintessentially masculine, terse, and sublimating prose as embedding these desired forms of masculinity within a text that both memorializes them and figures them as ultimately unavailable. Forter describes this formal embedding as a "*fetishistic* melancholia" (57) in that it keeps the lost object present while rendering its attainment an impossibility. In his final assessment, Forter argues that the novel insists "one must accede to castration and to the misery of unfulfilled longing—or else be condemned as sentimental, 'simpering,' and (thus) insufficiently manly" (64).

Forter begins his chapter on Faulkner, "Versions of Traumatic Melancholia: The Burden of White Man's History in *Light in August* and *Absalom, Absalom!*," by reworking the dominant understanding of Freud's theory of trauma. He distinguishes his reworked model of trauma by its reliance on Freud's early work on the subject rather than his later, more critically popular model. The difference, Forter suggests, is that while Freud's later model relies heavily on the shock and surprise of the traumatic event, his earlier work suggests that trauma occurs due to the "biphasic character of human sexuality" (100), suggesting that experiences beyond a child's comprehension are "retrodetermined" (103) as traumatic memories as that child reaches sexual adulthood and gathers the ability to understand the meanings behind these events. This model suggests the "potential for retrospective, traumatic identity-construction" and thus implicates patriarchy itself as "a normatively traumatogenic institution" (100). Forter's intervention into trauma theory here is important because while Freud's later model naturalizes trauma as symptomatic of the death drive, thus removing trauma from history, the early model opens doors for the analysis of social institutions' influence on gender, race, and class identities as traumatic psychic forces.

Using a short reading of *Light in August* to model his reformulation of trauma theory, Forter then offers a much more in depth reading of *Absalom* in which he shows how Sutpen's social trauma becomes deferred onto other socially vulnerable targets. He argues that Faulkner casts Sutpen's trauma as an Oedipal rivalry that "is for Faulkner the very mechanism of slavery's social reproduction" (114). Sutpen's induction into the social system of plantocracy comes as he is admonished by a plantation owner's slave for coming to the front door. This incident marks the end of Sutpen's innocence of this system and his now traumatic understanding of his place within it. His response to this trauma is to form a melancholically

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ambivalent connection to this planter, both idealizing him and seeking to destroy him by taking his place. Forter aims to show how the novel uses Sutpen to outline the historical transmission of systemic trauma from one generation to the next, via both Sutpen's own induction into this system and the way in which he passes this trauma on to Rosa, Quentin, Bon, and virtually every other character in the novel. Forter moreover argues that the novel enacts a form of "traumatic textualit[y]" (99) that passes the traumatic experience of its events on to the reader. While he praises Faulkner's work as coming closer to successful mourning than any of the other novels in his study, noting that Faulkner places responsibility for the events on its main character and suggests that he could have handled his trauma in some other way, Forter contends that this act of mourning ultimately fails because the work "melancholically *holds onto* the manhood [planter masculinity] whose destructiveness it anatomizes, insisting that the trauma that flows from it is the insurmountable, unmournable 'truth' of human History itself" (128). This chapter provides an excellent example of how Forter's reformulation of trauma theory illuminates social structures such as patriarchy and paternalism, and while his claim that the novel "*holds onto*" a paternalist masculinity is far-reaching, his reading certainly illustrates the way the novel naturalizes and thereby treats as historically inevitable the effects of such institutions.

The subject of his fourth chapter, "*The Professor's House*: Primitivist Melancholy and the Gender of Utopian Forms," seems an odd choice for Forter insofar as his work focuses primarily on men grieving for lost forms of masculinity. But he defends this choice by arguing that including Cather "suggest[s] the danger of a too-rapid association of marginal subject positions with progressive politics" (14), and warns that though Cather's recent (that is, more recent than the other authors discussed) inclusion in the modernist canon may be understood as the result of progressive canon expansion, her work does not necessarily offer an alternative example of how an artist might mourn the losses associated with capitalist modernity. While this chapter seems the weakest of the book, paying less attention to form and adhering more strictly to a general reading than the previous chapters, it makes the important contribution of suggesting that even a novel with clearly progressive aims can fall short of the goal of offering non-destructive modes of resistance. Forter's reading of *The Professor's House* illustrates that while Cather's work may offer critiques of heteronormativity and rigid gender binaries as it grieves for

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the loss of more fluid subject positions, inasmuch as this grief remains melancholic in nature it also forecloses on possibilities of escaping these social strictures.

Forter suggests that Cather's novel attempts to mourn for a primitive condition that predates the commodifying effects of bourgeois capitalism, representing this condition through womb imagery which recalls a state in which "the body is as yet unalienated from itself, gender has yet to be ruthlessly binarized, the border between the self and not-self is porous, and aesthetic activity retains a meaningfulness that cannot be assimilated to the logic of exchange" (142). He locates the novel's imagined alternative to modern capitalism in the racial primitivism associated with the community of the Indian Cliff Dwellers, arguing that the novel forecloses this possibility as Tom's work at the Cliffs Dwellers' city ultimately turns the artifacts he unearths into commodities. In Forter's view, Cather codes capitalist modernity as "ineradicably and essentially female" (153) as it is Peter's daughters' longing for material possessions and his social obligations to his wife that act as the catalysts for his commodification of the artifacts and consequent failure to escape the circuits of an alienating modernity. The novel symbolizes this scapegoating of the feminine in the figure of the mummified Mother Eve, whose name recalls the implication of the feminine in the fall and whose death the men blame on a fantasy of infidelity. This point becomes clear as Father Duchene hypothesizes that the move from a masculine warrior society to a feminine domestic society left this culture vulnerable to attack by other, more masculine cultures, leading to its extermination. Forter further reads St. Peter's choice to commit suicide in his attic room, one of the novel's womblike, creative spaces, as an articulation of Cather's deep ambivalence toward the feminine as both creative and destructive force, "literaliz[ing] the equation of womb with tomb" (177). Forter thus suggests that *The Professor's House,* in the ultimate melancholic gesture, offers death as the only possible escape from the commodifying effects of capitalist modernity.

Forter concludes his study with an afterword in which he discusses several contemporary works that he feels successfully mourn the losses of modernity rather than melancholically naturalizing loss and displacing aggression onto vulnerable scapegoats. These works include Russell Banks's *Affliction,* Art Spiegelman's *Maus,* and Paul Monette's *Love Alone.* Forter emphasizes these works' capacity to mourn for loss without eliding the social causes of loss. He suggests that these authors harness the aggression

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produced by loss and direct it at appropriate targets, fighting in the name of—rather than scapegoating—the memorialized lost. The comparison between these works and those which make up the focus of the book, however, feels tenuous; these two groups of authors are separated by more than fifty years, and each of these contemporary authors writes from the perspective of a decentered subject position. These differences necessarily inflect and thus complicate a comparison of their aesthetic approaches with those of their modernist forerunners. Yet, a discussion of the possibilities of a literary politics of mourning works well to end a book which not only warns against the dangers of melancholic bereavement of social loss, but calls for investigation of and intervention into the discourse on mourning theory that has rendered such bereavement canonical.

Despite limitations in his readings, Forter's book takes innovative steps in expanding the New Modernist critique of canonical modernism. *Gender, Race, and Mourning in American Modernism* offers a nuanced understanding of trauma and mourning theory, articulated in very readable prose, which affords opportunities for new understandings of canonical modernism's reaction to social loss. The book's most promising contribution to this discourse comes in the suggestion that the ambivalent nature of the losses of modernity for these canonical authors results in the displacement of anger onto the "textual scapegoats" of women and racial minorities. This formulation connects the gendered and racial anxieties germane to modernism by effectively reassessing the assumptions of contemporary mourning theory, thereby critiquing not just the literature but also the critical apparatus through which we currently read it. While Forter's overall argument would benefit from more examples—a wider array of authors from the period, a discussion of non-canonical authors who perhaps avoid this aesthetic, etc.—these issues will hopefully be taken up as scholars engage with this lucid and intelligent study.

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"I sure like to get letters"

The Letters of Ernest Hemingway, 1907–1922
edited by Sandra Spanier and Robert W. Trogdon
Cambridge University Press, 2011. 431 pages

Donald A. Daiker

Sandra Spanier and Robert W. Trogdon's new edition of Hemingway's letters is a magnificent achievement: the first of a projected sixteen-volume edition, it is a visually attractive, meticulously researched, scrupulously annotated, endlessly useful, and eminently readable collection of the letters written during the years Hemingway was growing into manhood and beginning to define himself as a writer. All told, this initial volume includes 264 pieces of correspondence—letters (some unsent), postcards, cables, even inscriptions—more than two-thirds of them previously unpublished and more than three-fourths not included in *Ernest Hemingway: Selected Letters, 1917-1961,* edited by Carlos Baker (1981). They range in chronological sequence from early notes to "Dear papa" that he had seen "a mother duck with seven little babies" (3) through letters written from Paris in 1922 to literary luminaries like Sherwood Anderson, Ezra Pound, and Gertrude Stein. Through the letters, which Spanier calls Hemingway's "autobiography in the continuous present tense" (xii), we follow the young baseball fan sending away for "action pictures" of players like Christy Matthewson, Rube Marquard, and Mordecai "Three-Finger" Brown, and we chuckle as the fifteen year old reports to an Oak Park Forest Park High School classmate that he has been "reading Marcelline my sweet ??????? sister's mail as usual trying to find out what the dames think of me" then boasts, "That is a peach of a porcupine I shot" (20). And in two remarkable previously unpublished letters written to former classmate Emily Goetzman when he was not yet seventeen, we find early signs of Hemingway's love of language and irony. He opens his letter with "On pended gknees I peg your bardun vor the ladness of this legger" (26), and after lamenting that Marcelline is keeping company with a "sweet" lad named Horace, he applauds "The marvel of the Feminine mind!" (33).

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As early as this 1916 letter, Hemingway strikes a chord that runs throughout his correspondence: he loves to receive letters in return. "D'ont worry about corresponding me to death," he writes to Goetzman. " It cawnt be did" (26). "Write me often," he pleads to Marcelline when she left Oak Park to attend Oberlin College. "It's lonesome as hell" (49). It is the rare letter that does not solicit, importune, or beg a letter in return—often with an admission of loneliness. Such requests are sometimes playful—"Why oh bright beam of an August moon have you not written me?" (127); sometimes polite—"Hope to get some letters from you soon" (320); sometimes casual—"Shoot me a letter" (200); sometimes almost desperate—"Believe the writer if you want to do some kind deed write me" (113)—but always sincere. "Man it was good to hear from you!" Hemingway wrote to Jim Gamble, who had been his commanding officer in 1918 when Hemingway was wounded in Italy. "I'm so darn glad to hear from you that I don't know what to write" (181), he continued—and then went on to write another 2000 words. "I sure like to get letters" (237), Hemingway admitted to his summer friend Grace Quinlan. He even developed his own epistolary vocabulary whereby he became the "enditer" or "screeder" (221), his recipient the "Enditee" (267), and his letters "screeds" or "epistles." Thus he doesn't write a letter but "indicts this epistle" (103), and in a previously unpublished letter he playfully commands his good friend Bill Smith to "Screed the enditer. Enlite to the Screeder" (215).

Such playfulness, verbal exuberance, and high spirits are a hallmark of these early Hemingway letters. He delights in coining words ("extraceedingly" [67]), in changing the form of "ing" nouns (spanking becomes "spankage" [244], kissing becomes "kissage" [285]), and in reversing letters so that October becomes "Tocober" (206), Petoskey "Teposkey" (220), and the Goddess of Liberty the "Libber of Goddesty" (98). Hemingway transforms the mundane "eat" into "assimilate some fodder" (65), and he asks Bill Smith not if Ruth Bradfield is good-looking but "Does she aid or mar an optic?" (268). As the creator of new words and phrases, it seems appropriate that the young Hemingway assume various names and guises: he refers to himself by turns as Ernest, Ernie, Ernestum, Wemedge, the old Brute, the Antique Brut, Gus, Stien, Stein, Hem, Hemmy, Hemingstien, Hemingstein, the great Hemingstein, the old Jazzz, the woodsman, the master woodsman, the Massive Woodsman, the master journalist, the Old Master, the peerless enditer, the American Hero of the Piave, and once, for

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some reason, even as "John K. Hollowbone" (206). Given his propensity in these letters for self-dramatization, for extravagant language, and for sometimes lame attempts at humor—Hemingway's friend Bill Horne called the letters "effusions" (266n)—it is amazing that just a year later, beginning in 1923, Hemingway would craft short stories like "Indian Camp" and "Cat in the Rain" that are concise, spare, unornamented, and restrained. Hemingway achieved his famed laconic style, his early letters make clear, only by suppressing his natural inclination to tell jokes, to show off, and to exaggerate. The overstatement and forced attempts at humor of the early letters can still be found in the nasty "Mr. and Mrs. Eliot" (1924) and in the failed *The Torrents of Spring* (1925), but they are absent in the best stories of *In Our Time* (1925) and in *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), the novel that marked Hemingway's first commercial success and that many readers believe to be his supreme achievement.

In one of the most touching scenes in that novel, Jake Barnes says to Lady Ashley, simply and truly, "Oh, Brett, I love you so much" (54). And more than anything else it is love and affection that animate these early Hemingway letters: love for his relatives and hometown friends from Oak Park, for the "Summer People" from Petoskey, and for his comrades in the American Red Cross Ambulance Service in wartime Italy; love for girls and women everywhere; and even love for the parents—Grace Hall Hemingway and Clarence Edmonds Hemingway—who are later depicted without great affection in stories like "The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife" and "A Way You'll Never Be." These letters overflow with invitations: "How I would love to see you," Hemmy writes to "Dear Old Kid" Bill Horne; "Come on Up for the love of the Lord. Or for anything else" (226-27). "Gosh Jenks it will be great to have you and Barney here" (200), Hemmy enthuses in a letter to two of his wartime buddies. When he learns that his Oak Park friend Isabelle Simmons will be visiting him in Switzerland, he can barely contain his joy: "I think it's the finest thing ever heard of . . ." (375). But when his friends can't come, there is an inevitable note of regret: "Wish you could Be along" (36) and "You oughta been there" (38). "Deare old Butstein," Wemedge writes to Kate Smith, who appears in the posthumously published "Summer People" as the sexual partner of Nick Adams (also called "Wemedge" in that story), "wish to hell you were here" (325).

These early letters reveal Hemingway's deep, heart-felt affection for his male friends, his "pals." He had many of them, too. Al Walker "sure is

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a great pal of mine" (84). Dale Wilson is "one of my best pals" (80). Bill Smith and Charles Hopkins "are the two best Pals I have" (139). Tubby Williams "is sure a good friend of mine" (213). Bill Horne is "one of my best pals" (246). Nick Neroni is "my best pal" (290). "Me and Ezra Pound are getting to be great pals" (330). In his earliest extant letter, previously unpublished, to Hadley Richardson, who within the year would become Mrs. Hemingway, "Ernesto" writes that his wartime commander "Jim Gamble is great—and I love him a lot—but not like I love you—you dearest, Dearest Dear" (259).

And indeed however much Hemingway liked and even loved men—however eagerly he sought male companionship for his hiking, hunting, fishing, and skiing expeditions—it was women he fell in love with and, from an early age, wanted to marry. "Kiss *all* your room mates for the Stien" (59; my italics), the 18-year-old Hemingway wrote to his older sister Marcelline at Oberlin College. He told his mother later that same month, "I havnt seen a girl in Kansas City yet and that is a hard predicament for a guy that has been in love with someone ever since he can remember" (64). But it would only be three months until he happily confessed to Marcelline, nicknamed Ivory, "I have met the fair one and have fell hard. Ivory if you hear of me plunging off into Matrimony be not surprised" (81). The "fair one" was silent-film actress Mae Marsh, whom Ernie calls "the future Mrs. Hemingstein." But what is most revealing about this previously unpublished letter is Hemingway's "Gee Ivory I am comfortable now that I am in love again" (81).

Six months later, Mae Marsh out of sight and apparently out of heart and mind, Ernie wrote from a Milan hospital, "Mom I'm in love again" (136). This time it was Agnes von Kurowsky, a Red Cross nurse Ernie called "the Missis" (165) who would become the model for Luz in "A Very Short Story" (1924) and Catherine Barkley in *A Farewell to Arms* (1929). Her "Dear John" letter in March 1919 left Hemingway "just smashed" (177). "I've loved Ag," Ernie wrote to Bill Horne. "She's been my ideal and Bill I forgot all about religion and everything else—because I had Ag to worship" (177). But within a couple of months Hemmy could write with equanimity about Agnes to his good pal Howell Jenkins, "I set out to cauterize out her memory and I burnt it out with a course of booze and other women and now it's gone" (193). Those other women included Marjorie Bump, a Petoskey native who would appear as "Marge" in "The End of Something" (1924) and, as a topic of Nick and Bill's con-

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versation, in "The Three-Day Blow" (1924). In an apparently unsent letter, in poetic language rare in these missives, Hemingway thanked Marge for making "that summer of 1919—Best ~~I've ever had~~ summer there ever was I guess. . . . It was idyllic—perfect as some days in Spring are and mountain valleys you pass on puffing trains—and other impermanent things" (278).

The other women also included Petosky native Grace Quinlan, a high school student during the summers of 1919 and 1920 who was seven years younger than Hemingway. Even while Hemingway was courting Hadley Richardson, eight years his senior, during the fall of 1920 and the winter, spring, and summer of 1921, he was writing adoring—and occasionally poetic—letters to Grace. In August 1921, the month before his wedding to Hadley, Stein twice writes Grace what have to be considered love letters. In one he tells her that he is lonely, that he dreams about her, and that he wants to see her before the day of his "heavy marriage" (302). In the other he tells her that she is "very dear, very beautiful, very much older than your years. . . . Wish you were here to talk to. I'm lonely as the deuce." What is most remarkable about this letter is that its penultimate paragraph, which mentions a picture of Hadley in her wedding dress that Hemingway had enclosed, is followed by the valediction, "Good night old Dearest—I love you very much" (299). Hemingway's vast capacity for affection, for both giving and receiving love, his propensity for caring deeply for two or more women at the same time, did not get him into trouble then—he passed himself off as Grace's "Bro" (299) as he would later in life cloak his desire by calling the young women he loved "daughter"—but it would lead to grief four summers later in Paris. There, as Hemingway recounts in his memoir *A Moveable Feast* (1964), he had the "bad luck" (208) to fall in love with Pauline Pfeiffer while he was still in love with Hadley. Pauline would become the second Mrs. Hemingway, but Ernest would never stop loving Hadley. "I love people" (299), Ernie had written to his mother Grace, and—for the young Hemingway at least—it was certainly true, perhaps too true. When Hemingway had interviewed Chicago attorney Mary Bartelme in early 1921, he wrote his mother, "An excellent woman and I fell hard for her and wrote a wonderful story" (264). Such serial, overlapping affection became the pattern of his life.

Co-editors Sandra Spanier (who is also the General Editor of the Hemingway Letters Project) and Robert W. Trogdon have included in this

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handsome volume every tool a scholar could wish for: a detailed roster of correspondents; a calendar of letters with date, recipient, form, source, and publication status; an index of letter recipients; and a full general index. (The concluding volume, they promise, will include a comprehensive index.) In addition, each of the editors has written a clear and helpful introduction: Spanier to the edition, Trogdon to this first volume. Linda Patterson Miller, who chairs the Editorial Advisory Board, has contributed a foreword that provides both a literary and biographical context for these early letters. The volume also includes a useful chronology of events in Hemingway's life, 1907-1922; maps of Oak Park, Northern Michigan, Paris, and World War I Italy; and photographs of Hemingway and the people he cared for. These include the four women most important to the young Hemingway: his mother, Grace Hall Hemingway; his girlfriend Marjorie Bump; Agnes von Kurowsky; and Elizabeth Hadley Richardson, who became the first—and most beloved—of Hemingway's four wives. The volume places these tools at the fingertips of the scholar while rendering them unobtrusive for the pure letter reader. For that magnificent gift, I join the entire literary community in thanking and commending Professors Spanier, Trogdon, and Miller.

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Imagining Rooted Cosmopolitanism

Nabokov, Rushdie and the Transnational Imagination: Novels of Exile and Alternate Worlds
by Rachel Trousdale
New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. 252 pages

Kalyan Nadiminti

Theorists and critics of cosmopolitanism agree on one thing: in the wake of Kant's original formulation of the concept there have arisen multifarious, competing versions of cosmopolitanism, each with its own approach to the balance of locale and world. The belief that there is no single definitive version of cosmopolitan thinking, or even a consensus about what constitutes a cosmopolitan ethics, has spawned an explosion of studies, especially since 1983, about the cosmopolitan exile. The predicament of the exiled individual has become a kind of standard position in transnational studies, and scholars like Pheng Cheah and James Clifford subsequently suggest treading with caution.[1]

Into this situation comes Rachel Trousdale's book *Nabokov, Rushdie and the Transnational Imagination*, which shifts the conversation about the condition of exile into a discussion of its ability to access and activate a fluid understanding of the transnational condition. From a wide range of authors, Trousdale singles out Vladimir Nabokov and Salman Rushdie as exemplars of transnational literature. While she does not directly cite Stanley Fish's notion of an interpretive reader,[2] she posits a reconfigured version of this notion in order to examine the transnational experience as a primarily fictional and imaginative enterprise. What is at stake in transnational fiction, she argues, is the dislocated locatedness of author and reader alike.

Other theorists influence Trousdale's reading of transnational literature more explicity. She draws upon Kwame Anthony Appiah's contention, in his account of what he calls rooted cosmopolitanism, that "anywhere you travel in the world . . . you can find ceremonies . . . rooted in centuries-old traditions. [At the same time] you will also find everywhere . . . many intimate connections with places far away: Washington, Moscow, Mexico City, Beijing" (89). Rooted cosmopolitanism licenses Trousdale's own

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argumentative movement between the local and the global in her readings of transnational fiction. And in her opening move she recasts Homi Bhabha's notion of the hybrid with the help of Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the dialogic, highlighting Bhabha's attention to the importance of "participatory" discussion in textual interpretation (qtd in Trousdale 3). She constructs her argument for the imaginative potential of fiction by extending Benedict Anderson's notion of imagined communities to posit that the imagined worlds of transnational literature fashion a reader who gleans participatory ethics from an alternate world. Finally, she recasts Arjun Appadurai's theory of the postnational[3] to enunciate a perennially unstable transnationalism evading categorization. This "transnationalism . . . tries to have it both ways: to cross borders and to acknowledge them, to fuse separate places and recognize their separation" (12). Crucially, "transnationality is the process by which new identity categories are created and not the means by which they are maintained—the missing piece in Appiah's rooted cosmopolitanism" (13); her examination of Nabokov and Rushdie pays minute attention to such a refusal to hypostatize fixed identities.

Transnational fiction, in Trousdale's account, creates a readerly space that enables the reader to improvise a creative, communitarian response to a politically fraught world. She emphasizes that the reader "learns" (27) to refashion the real world through the imaginative potential made accessible by such mobile writing. As she contends in her first chapter, this has not always been the case. Early transnational writing, beginning with Conrad and continuing with Naipaul, found it implausible to think about a transnational condition in terms of group identity. They remained preoccupied with the predicament of the individual caught helplessly in the nets of overlapping cultures. An explicit and intentional connection between community and imaginative transformation comes to the fore only with Nabokov and Rushdie, the former influencing the latter with far-reaching implications, she argues—hence her focus on these two writers.

Trousdale devotes two full chapters to Nabokov, meticulously considering his prestidigitation with place and imagination. "Nabokov's Invented Worlds" examines the writer's juxtaposition of geographical and readerly locations, teasing out the interplay between imaginative readers and physical places. For example, she notes that Humbert's exhortations to the reader to judge his partly imagined America bring an important

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clarification: "the physical world does not respond directly to imaginative reinterpretation" (45). Instead the physical world intrudes into the imagination: the American landscape provides a steadily mounting "resistance" (39) to Humbert's desire for "mastery" (41) over Lolita. It prevents him from imaginatively converting a harsh and gritty American landscape into a pliant and titillating Arcadia. Trousdale's reading charts a double movement in both imagination and space, one that she argues is emblematic of transnational fiction: while the wild landscape of America will not allow Humbert to possess Lolita outdoors, it is his projection of America that allows him to emerge from solipsism. Instead of a purely imaginative America, Humbert stumbles upon a synthesized realm containing both desire and resistance.

Trousdale finds a similar "synthesis of idealism and realism" (45) in *Pale Fire*. She stresses that the novel's protagonist Charles Kinbote pays minute attention to the demands of the real upon the imagination: "America not only offers a way to import Kinbote's private, aristocratic imaginings into a democratically accessible landscape, it also provides a literal space for literary realms" (53). Trousdale's most lucid and far-reaching statement in the chapter comes when she notes that "the transnational must find a compromise: either a metaphysical meeting ground . . . or a fusion he cannot control" (55). Thereby, he must effectively find a "compromise" in the reality he wishes to inhabit and the imagination he wishes to activate. This strategy activates a simultaneous readerly appraisal of the stakes involved in both an imaginary space and the real world, exposing again the double bind of desire and resistance. The double bind extends itself to the readers as well. While "Kinbote hopes to undergo [a] transformation . . . to become assimilated into another person—who appears to be Nabokov himself" (56), he finds that he has indeed lost "control" (55) and commits suicide. However, "his last vision of an alternate future [shifts] the novel's epistemological ground" to an external, non-textual reality. Consequently, the readers become "Kinbotes," mutating into "a community of rival partisans" (57).

In "Realism, Relativism and Frames of Reference," her second chapter on Nabokov, Trousdale examines the author's use of physics in *Ada*, considering both his hostility to Einstein's theory of relativity and his deployment of a deliberately flawed "special relativity" (71) through Van Veen. Trousdale dexterously incorporates scientific ideas into her discussion, never losing sight of her larger argument about simultane-

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ous spatiotemporal realities. She minutely examines the twin paradox in relativity theory and draws our attention to a "traveling frame of reference" (83) that is essential to interpret Van's obstinate refusal "to believe that he and Ada may be in separate frames of reference" (84). The fluidity of "physical space and time" (89) is the crux of this chapter, where Trousdale argues that Nabokov makes apparent how "real-world surroundings already fuse past and present." In this condition, it becomes the reader's task to "assimilate the various time frames . . . into a unified and interdependent whole" (88). However, Trousdale's stress on the reader finds itself on wobbly ground here, especially when she contends that "the third space of literature provides a place from which to move the world" (89). One of the book's continuing problems is that Trousdale does not offer sufficient clarification of her deployment of and distinction between the words "real" and "fiction." While it remains clear that transnational fiction enables a fluid understanding of "our mental geographies" (19), her observations about the power of literature to build communities in the real world occasionally seem to be in danger of assuming a very literal, one-to-one correspondence. This slippage threatens to flatten the potency attributed to fictional world-making.

Turning to Rushdie, Trousdale pays minute attention to "the incompleteness of Indian cosmopolitanism" (91) and the dire consequences of such an imperfect vision. Her first chapter on Rushdie, titled "Cosmopolitanism and the Shiv Sena in *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh*," unpacks Rushdie's extensive critique of "pluralist intellectuals who claim to be inclusive but do not include the poor, and Hindu nationals, who intend to include almost exclusively the Hindu poor but unwittingly embrace Western practices." Trousdale goes into meticulous historical and political detail about India's complicated trysts with communalism and nationalism, sifting through the renaming of Bombay to Mumbai and the rise of the Hindu right-wing organization, the Shiv Sena. Much as Nabokov prods his readers into providing an interpretive framework for his world-making, Indian politics (and Rushdie's novels, Trousdale's argument goes) demand the same kind of interpretive work to assess one's allegiances, both on the national and the communal scales. Noting Rushdie's fascination with hybridity, Trousdale returns to her opening appropriation of Appiah's rooted cosmopolitanism, finding Rushdie's politics to be simultaneously local and global in its scope. Rushdie's contribution to the concept of cosmopolitanism lies in his insistence on self-creation.

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This does not of course constitute a startlingly new claim about either Indian politics or Rushdie's novels, but Trousdale valuably underscores the simultaneous, competing allegiances that the transnational reader-citizen must negotiate. Read against Nabokov's politics, it becomes clear that Rushdie's transnationalism has a "counterintuitive" (92) charge, constantly doubling back on itself.

Trousdale ultimately argues, however, that Rushdie's cosmopolitanism fails in the Bombay novels because the individual can never supersede the group. For example, Saleem's suppression of Gandhi throughout *Midnight's Children* signals an aversion to heroic figures in the theater of nation-building: "National heroes, no matter how inclusive they wish to be, cannot include everyone" (110), a problem that also underlies the "immense real-world repercussions of nationalist imaginings of community" (114). What Trousdale makes clear at the end of this chapter is that the Bombay novels "appear to leave readers without a way to reconcile the competing demands of cosmopolitans and communalists" providing instead "a vision of the absorption of the narrator into the surrounding crowds" (115). Her stress here and elsewhere in the chapter is on the "shifty 'I' [that] arises from the tension between the individual at the moment of action . . . and the polyvocal speaker at the moment of narration" (116). This tenuous "I" limns what one might call the limits of multiculturalism, with *Midnight's Children* perpetually failing to enunciate a pluralistic individuality.

Trousdale's penultimate chapter on *The Satanic Verses*, meanwhile, calls attention to the anti-authoritarian character of transnational fiction, but struggles to make new claims amidst a sea of criticism. Her sub-headings seem a little dated, announcing discussions for instance of "Indeterminacy and the Narrator" (127) and "The Multiplicity of the Individual" (129). The chapter is on more compelling ground when tackling uneasy categories of identity that enter an either/or subject position and abandons a both/and paradigm. For example, Trousdale uses the *hamza nama* cloths commissioned by the Mughal Emperor Akbar in the sixteenth century to illustrate how in the novel "foreign imports . . . become the new Indian citizens" (135). Though manufactured elsewhere, the synthesis of styles in the *hamza nama* cloths emphasize that "art is a *process* rather than a product" (134), clarifying that the "Indian" has long been formed out of transnational networks. This confluence of "the imported and the regional [creates] an imaginary-yet-real intermediate space between the local and the global" (132), a space cognate with what Trousdale earlier theorizes

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as "the third space of literature" (89). She contends that it is through such conflict-driven experiences of nationality, with their competing visions and flawed constructions of national identity, that a "new diaspora of transnational literati" is formed (139).

In her final chapter on Rushdie, Trousdale argues that he puts this "transnational literati" to the test in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, a book in which competing realities emerge in far more seditious and suspicious terms. Trousdale seeks to rescue this novel from its many detractors, concentrating on its attention to musical mixing, particularly the "bouncing down" (154) of tracks. What Ormus, Rushdie's half-Greek, half-Zarathustrian genius, achieves is a musical synthesis akin to Appiah's rooted cosmopolitanism: "he shows how 'many selves can be, in song, a single multitude.'"[4] Ormus, unlike Saleem and Gibreel, finds a way to present competing realities without discrediting any of them, while simultaneously producing "a single unified whole" (151). The central achievement of this chapter is Trousdale's adapting of "bouncing down" to illustrate "a community of shared displacement" (144) able to encompass simultaneous, seemingly discordant realities. Unsurprisingly, she argues that the reader becomes essential in parsing out the import of these realities. Arguing that the reader is surprised by the experience of being smoothly transitioned into an alternate world, the world of Jesse Aaron Parker and JFK's botched assassination, she demonstrates the necessity for imagining an implied, outside reader who can integrate the colliding worlds of the novel. Trousdale here reaffirms her focus on fictional framing strategies, showcasing the primacy of an implied reader in transnational outsideness in which an "outsider . . . becomes an insider through nothing more than a shift of the frame" (145). As she does throughout the book, Trousdale insists that the acknowledgement of frames fosters recognition of "the extent to which our framings are partial," arguing that we must "see that there are aspects of our realities that cannot be fully informed from within" (162).

In her expansive concluding remarks, Trousdale champions the power of fiction's imaginative capacity to rewrite "filiation" and "affiliation" alike, a dichotomy that she takes from Edward Said's taxonomy of modernist writers (qtd in Trousdale 165). She argues that such an essential migrant reader who reads between the lines, so to speak, functions much more productively when staking a claim for a space between nationalities. This is not a position that is the exclusive capital of diaspora, something that Trousdale repeatedly notes. And yet, she does in fact seem to insist on the

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primacy of the exile as the ideal (if not the only) advocate of this hybrid position. When discussing Michael Chabon, geographically American but affiliated through his writing to the Jewish diaspora, she stresses his willingness to identify himself as "doubly exiled . . . not only [as] an American novelist but also a member of the Jewish diaspora" (182).

What remains unclear, sometimes productively, in Trousdale's argumentative framework is how transnational fiction "teaches" (194) its readers to build communities without falling into an authoritarian circuit of master and pupil. The solution Trousdale seems to gravitate towards is one we might understand with reference to Jacques Rancière's "ignorant schoolmaster" paradigm,[5] where the instructive quality of transnational literature is not deliberate but suggestive. The ignorant schoolmaster, unlike his pedantic counterpart, imparts knowledge not by measuring and refurbishing the ignorance of his pupil, but by imparting knowledge that he himself cannot know. Even if Nabokov does plot a deliberately difficult chess puzzle in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, the premise of its literariness does not hinge on the successful solution of the problem. But Trousdale never makes this formulation explicit, and so the problem of authority remains surprisingly unresolved in her otherwise nuanced argument. The authoritative overtones of instructive fiction linger uncomfortably at times, and the scope of the book might have been more expansive had it emphasized the suggestive rather than the prescriptive quality of transnational writing.

Furthermore, a paradox arises from Trousdale's effort to imagine a community of transnational readers who willingly enter a condition of migrancy. She acknowledges that Nabokov and Rushdie produce difficult writing, with their works constituting, among other things, latter-day deployments of the deliberately alienating tactics of modernism. She notes, for instance, that readers often find themselves out of the loop with references and must put in a considerable degree of work to gain access to the worlds their fictions straddle. The difficulty with such an argument is that Trousdale must perpetually postulate an elite readership while simultaneously theorizing a universally participative audience. As a result, her model of the migrant reader is not always sustainable. For example, Trousdale argues that Nabokov "requires readers to cocreate an implied ideal country, one that combines the best of exile and of a lost homeland" (39). But she does not attempt to tease out the validity of this best of both worlds philosophy and thus leaves some of the ethical implications of such a winnowing process unexplored. What exactly is "the best of exile and

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of a lost homeland" (39)? How do we arrive at such an approximation? In steadfastly arguing for an ideal implied reader that both Nabokov and Rushdie privilege in different ways, Trousdale comes very close to privileging the migrant condition as a demiauthorial position.

Many critics have noted transnationalism's fixation on the migrant. Pheng Cheah, for instance, remains troubled by the hybridity theorist's "metropolitan" gaze and objects that "everything happens [in considering hybridity] as if there were no postcolonials left in decolonized space" (92). He goes on to argue that "Bhabha's [and the general hybridity theorist's] picture of contemporary globalization is virulently postnational because he pays scant attention to those postcolonials for whom postnationalism through mobility is not an alternative" (93). It is not so much that Trousdale does not consider the immobile, rooted postcolonial, but that the universally accessible position of the migrant reader unintentionally comes close to casting transnational experience as impossible from other locations.

Finally, Trousdale's selection of texts remains squarely canonical—especially in her chapters on Rushdie, which are limited to the three Bombay novels. This excludes his highly imaginative children's novel written under the Fatwa, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories,* as well as the wide-ranging battle among cosmopolitanism, nationalism, and terrorism played out in *Shalimar the Clown*. Both these texts merit some space in a project like Trousdale's. *Shalimar the Clown* in particular could illustrate the dangerous explosion of ethnic nationalism coupled with terrorism that the Sena in *The Moor's Last Sigh* represent on a much smaller scale. And the place of imaginative fiction and its instructive qualities in the real world, subjects essential to understanding Rushdie's notion of displacement, are in fact the central themes of *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*.

Overall, *Nabokov, Rushdie and the Transnational Imagination* makes a strong, insightful case for transnational literature's preoccupation with affiliation, remaining continually alert to the self-conscious ways that transnational writers seek to recast socially and politically ossified communitarian beliefs. Decoupling identity from physicality, Trousdale gives us a nuanced account of how readers become "rooted cosmopolitans" (13) with "awareness of [the process of reinterpretation], rather than simple ethnic or national affiliations, as a key part of their own identities" (194). And she makes a convincing case for her literary historical claim that in works by transnational authors like Nabokov and Rushdie a new genre has been created, one "that relocates and redefines the meaning of home" (193).

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Notes

1. Cheah notes in *Inhuman Conditions: On Cosmopolitanism and Human Rights* that "the pain and suffering of migrants, political refugees and exiles . . . do not represent the whole picture of contemporary globalization" (92). Similarly, Clifford in his essay "Mixed Feelings" finds that

> the term cosmopolitan, separated from its (European) universalist moorings, quickly become[s] a traveling signifier, a term always in danger of breaking up into partial equivalences: exile, immigration, migrancy, diaspora, border-crossing, pilgrimage, tourism. Thus, before we even begin to speak of 'cosmopolitanisms' we are caught up in the unmanageable, risky work of translation. (363)

2. See Stanley Fish. *Is There A Text In This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities.*

3. In Trousdale's words,

> Appadurai argues that between the increasing cosmopolitanism of both the elite and the labor force and the increased globalization of corporations, we are living in a 'postnational' era in which national borders present bureaucratic technicalities rather than real demarcations of linguistic, cultural, or economic difference." (10)

4. Trousdale notes that while "Saleem cracks under the strains of millions of Indias, Ormus 'bounces down' the entire world. Ormus does for artistic pluralism what characters in the previous novels do for personal identity: he shows how 'many selves can be, in song, a single multitude'" (155).

5. See Jacques Rancière. *The Ignorant School Master. Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation.*

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The Politics of Inadequacy

The Event of Postcolonial Shame
by Timothy Bewes
Princeton University Press, 2011. 224 pages

David James

One needn't be a doomsayer to suggest that postcolonial literary studies is flying through a patch of turbulence, entering a rather bumpy phase of self-scrutiny characterized by a good deal of methodological debate. Such self-reflexivity is a healthy thing for any field, of course. But this process is all the more politically fraught and ethically freighted for a discipline that, according to some, is particularly prone to falling into a settled consensus about what its historical objects of critique should be and how those objects should be approached. In his most recent polemic, for instance, Neil Lazarus posits a fundamental yet overlooked disjuncture between the aims of postcolonial criticism and its tendency to declare texts pertinent only insofar as they "permit—which is to say, not actively disallow—a certain, very specific and very restricted kind of reading to be staged through reference to them" (22). Nor is Lazarus alone in pointing out the side effects of the prevalence with which that "signature critique of colonialist (mis-) representation [has] tended to broaden and flatten out" at the expense of a more variegated and unpredictable account of how "'postcolonial' writers have approached and thought through the difficulties of 'representation' (variously conceived)" (19). John J. Su also takes issue with postcolonial criticism's suspicion that the formal analysis of literary works inherently risks endorsing post-Enlightenment theories of aesthetic appreciation or even reproducing the ahistorical protocols of New Criticism. Arguing against this suspicion, Su contends that the time is now right for a reassessment of the role of aesthetic criticism in postcolonial studies: "given the centrality of the aesthetic to the formation of modern nation-states in Western Europe and the dominant ideological forms of class society appropriate to them, the importance of sentiments, affections, and bodily habits—the so-called aesthetic realm—to forms of postcolonial reasoning needs to be explored" (128). And James Procter, working in the field of black British writing, echoes these calls from Lazarus and Su for a

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consideration of the compositional texture of texts that might otherwise be recruited in an instrumentalizing manner as auxiliaries for prevailing geopolitical concerns. It "is our responsibility," insists Procter, "to make [a writer's] aesthetic do more work than the current fashions within postcolonial studies are making it do. Rather than looking for progressive political content, as it is somehow embedded within individual literary texts, we need to pay more attention to the ways in which we articulate, or connect them to contemporary political concerns" (44).

On turning to the contents page of *The Event of Postcolonial Shame*, one is tempted to affiliate Timothy Bewes with such reorientations in "attention," and to anticipate the ways in which his book will allow the "aesthetic" qualities of postcolonial writing to "do more work." That's because, at first glance, this study is highly *writerly*, both in organization and in focus. With chapter titles that make it clear that this is going to be an author-led discussion, we're invited to assume that Bewes has chosen novelists who press against the limitations of the "postcolonial," whether as an epithet or as a literary-historical periodization; and we're also invited to suppose that those writers will be confronted as practitioners rather than ciphers, their works addressed in ways that foreground the distinctive demands of their style without trying to explain away those demands in symptomatic terms. But while Bewes shares with these other commentators the impulse to rethink the correlation of aesthetics and politics in postcolonial criticism, what he offers is both less straightforwardly polemical than Lazarus's intervention and less adamant about the need to reassert, as Procter and Su do, a formally committed critical practice. This is the case despite Bewes's effort—as I'll discuss below—to theorize the relationship between shame and form at some length. Instead of offering an unequivocal corrective to the perceived shortfalls of postcolonial criticism, Bewes is more interested in layers of implication (both the novelist's and the critic's) in the very structures of colonial apprehension that the creative and scholarly industries of contemporary culture seek to interrogate.

If the disappointments of Bewes's approach result from its ambition and achievements, he has to a degree prepared us for this via the paradoxical logic of his overarching aesthetic claim: "Failure is in some sense a measure of the work's success," he attests, qualifying this maxim by arguing that "the aesthetic tension between failure and success at the level of the perceiving subject is destroyed by a catastrophic and decisive irrup-

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tion of the ethical. Not the ethical as a *new content* for literature, however, or a replacement of aesthetic concerns with ethical ones; rather, in the twentieth century, the ethical appears as a permanent *rendering inadequate* of form" (19). As we'll see, inadequacy becomes a new poetics, dominating many of Bewes's primary readings. Tinges of failure also inflect the book's opening anecdote, though this time they're failures of physiology rather than literary form. "I have just reached the age of forty," Bewes announces in the prologue—a threshold that marks, he adds (rather ominously), "life's midpoint" (1). Bewes continues in this somewhat morose vein, staging a series of reflections that are supposed to encapsulate "the shame of being a man." Thus we hear of the decline in posture (apparently he's got a "growing paunch and an incipient stoop"), lack-luster physiognomy ("slightly sunken" eyes and "pasty" complexion), and (rather unconvincingly) his own incompatibility with a scholarly career—"I am not really 'cut out' for academic work," he writes, when surely both his hunch and "resentment of physical exercise" do everything to suggest how suitable he is for the job. This rather performative opening will charm some readers and embarrass others, depending how far you think Bewes's allegedly "facetious sense of humor" is in fact cheekily framing a self-portrait that seems so earnestly self-reflexive as to neutralize any whiff of irony—much like the kind of postmodern novel that's so preoccupied with its own metafictional games that it fails to notice when it's taking itself too seriously. The phrase upon which Bewes's opening vignette riffs is, of course, taken from Deleuze. Bewes might have been better off, however, taking it from Steven Connor, who a decade ago adopted "The Shame of Being a Man" as his title for an essay that's significantly absent from Bewes's otherwise copious body of interlocutors. As Connor lucidly argued, although "shame tends nowadays to be seen as a moral emotion, and to be discussed as an ethical problem, its reach is larger than this. . . . Shame is not only to be thought of as a moral prop or provocation, but a condition of being" (211). A comparable approach to the ontology of shame emerges in Bewes's framework; for him too, shame is a "condition," but one of *writing* as well of *being*, as it erupts in the materiality—and, crucially, the potentiality—of the novel form as such.

Once the self-portraiture has been gotten out of the way, Bewes explains this thesis with admirable clarity. Shame is "an event of writing," he avers, one "in which the tension between the ethical and aesthetic dimensions of literature is brought into sensuous existence, made manifest

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in all its irreconcilability." As such, it "is the material embodiment of that tension, a moment at which the formal possibilities open to the work are incommensurable with, or simply inadequate to, its ethical responsibilities" (1). Here, then, inadequacy makes its initial appearance on stage, becoming later not just a keyword but also an interpretive priority:

> When it comes to literature, a practice that, in the modern period, involves the transfiguration of individual experience into an aesthetic form, the very presence of shame raises questions concerning the ethical, political, or representational adequacy of the text—questions that remain, therefore, unanswerable. In literary works, shame does not exist in some buried state, to be unearthed by the penetrating critic; rather, shame appears overtly, as the text's experience of its own inadequacy. (3)

This emphasis on how fiction *embodies* an awareness of its own inadequacy runs throughout the ensuing chapters, as Bewes deftly moves beyond a purely thematic engagement with the emplotment of inequity, violence, and oppression to a formally attentive consideration of the shame that is both constitutive of the contemporary writer's attempt to articulate the legacies of colonialism and revealing of his or her complicity in the forces of inequality and imperial self-assertion he or she seeks to resist. It follows, therefore, that "shame is not located primarily in the content of the work. It is, rather, a materialization of the discrepancy between content and form, of the inadequacy of form with respect to content" (39). In turning to his core corpus of innovators, Bewes addresses shame as "the experience of a situation in which the ethical (or aesthetic) obligation to write and the aesthetic (or ethical) impossibility of writing are equally irrefutable" (43).

Bewes divides *The Event of Postcolonial Shame* into three parts: "The Form of Shame," "The Time of Shame," and "The Event of Shame." Within this tripartite format, he provides chapters on figures as different as Caryl Phillips, V. S. Naipaul, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Zoë Wicomb, and J. M. Coetzee. Each of these discussions contains theoretical subsections that operate like philosophical interludes, placing fiction writers in dialogue with such conceptually diverse thinkers as Sartre, Deleuze, Badiou, and Adorno. With space here merely to offer highlights rather than thorough summaries of his densely argued chapters, I'll give snapshots of the kinds of insights Bewes's approach yields, while pinpointing some of the draw-

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backs of finding, as he does, formal correlatives for shame as "a negative affect" (27)—including inadvertently homogenizing the work of innovators who are radically distinct in technique. If shame operates both as a motivation for and horizon of Bewes's pursuit of the "materialization of the discrepancy between content and form" in these novelists, a question arises about the extent to which his readings are so determined in advance as to compromise this book's otherwise valuable attention to the "material characteristics" and stylistic particularity of the novelists to whom it devotes such theoretically sophisticated attention.

Part I contends that the important issue in reading postcolonial literature is "not 'Can the Subaltern speak?' but What does it mean to 'speak' in a literary form such as fiction? What ethical and aesthetic assumptions are involved in talking about the possibility or the impossibility of literature as such?" (12). In turning to Caryl Phillips in his second chapter, Bewes probes the implications of these questions in relation to narrative voice. He homes in on "the difficulties and infelicities" in the work of a novelist who has persistently attempted to replicate the historical dialect of his narrators, most famously in *Cambridge* (1991), *Crossing the River* (1993), and *The Nature of Blood* (1997). In Phillips's writing, according to Bewes, shame is to be found "embedded in situations, narratives, and characters" (55), yet also "in two closely related, apparently superficial elements which proliferate inseparably from them: ventriloquy and cliché" (61). Bewes notes that Phillips has often annoyed reviewers with his "endless pages of derivative prose penned by his characters" (62), as though he's aspiring so hard for a level of discursive authenticity that his register lapses into exaggeration or parody. However, these apparent failings are—in line with the critical logic of Bewes's argument elsewhere—the markers of the ethical accountability and potential self-awareness of Phillips's fiction. That is, Phillips's ventriloquism, however grating its effects, in fact draws our attention to the materiality of his narratives' "refusal or their inability (which amounts to the same thing) to strive for some technical means of speaking, of reducing the text from the status of an event—one that is thoroughly implicated in every impossible exchange that it narrates—to the category of the literary" (70). This is a particularly severe chapter, wherein Bewes makes no bones about leveling serious criticism at Phillips's "*restriction* of voices, under the sign of ventriloquy" (71). Readers may disagree with the grounds for Bewes's complaint here—and the entire chapter appears to rest on the assumption that we share the same level of

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awkwardness or frustration in reaction to Phillips's handling of voice—but there's a more productive upshot of Bewes's inquiry. This lies in its reminder of the fact that "for all their resonance with the person and work of Caryl Phillips, 'diaspora,' the 'Black Atlantic,' and 'postcoloniality' are limited in their critical efficacy as long as they are conceived in positive terms" that sideline or palliate the formal and characterological infelicities of his writing (71). It's in such instances as these that Bewes demonstrates a knack for standing back from the density of his theoretical meditation on shame's formal and ethical manifestations, in order to resituate the significance of a figure like Phillips within a field whose terminologies can become so familiar as to produce formulations that are predictable, however much they claim to be political.

A similar cluster of methodological issues attends the work of J. M. Coetzee, who has become a—if not *the*—contemporary exemplar for developments in ethical criticism. In his fifth chapter, Bewes approaches Coetzee in the first of two climactic demonstrations of shame as an *event*. This term surely gives a nod to Derek Attridge, who could have become a useful interlocutor for this book, but whose contribution to Coetzee studies is briskly dispatched in one of Bewes's footnotes. In Attridge's stylistically penetrating work on Coetzee, reading becomes an event in itself because the "meaning of a literary work"—including the critical work carried out by its form—"can be understood as a verb rather than as a noun: not something carried away when we have finished reading it, but something that happens as we read or recall it" (9). In contrast to Attridge's largely positive account of the ethical conjunction of postcolonial critique and literary innovation in Coetzee's fiction, Bewes sees shame as, once again, "a manifestation of the impossibility, even the obscenity," of representation as an act (137), given that apartheid supplies both the "occasion of Coetzee's writing and its condition of possibility" (137–38). As in Bewes's commentaries on Phillips and Naipaul, a familiar refrain of complicity and inadequacy rears its head: "In a situation of ethical or moral complexity, such as the exercise of writing within and about apartheid, shame may be neither invoked nor transcended without incurring more of it" (138). What sets this chapter apart, however, is the way Bewes illuminates the arc of shame as it appears on a characterological level across Coetzee's oeuvre. Zeroing in on the generically self-conscious late fiction (*Slow Man* and *Diary of a Bad Year*), Bewes makes fascinating sense of Coetzee's reflexivity as a deliberate "acknowledgment of shame," and

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as "the very means by which his own writing practice has held onto its privileged relationship to the apparatus of literary production" (150). *Slow Man* could have been something of a centerpiece for this chapter, but Bewes's readings of it are at times tantalizingly underdeveloped, with brief quotations bearing the cargo of philosophical explication. Thus a genuinely engaging discussion of "The New Direction" in Coetzee's career ends in a rather truncated fashion with the highly suggestive observation that "the hinge text seems to be *Disgrace*: a work in which shame ceases to be merely an exchangeable or analyzable term in a literary system and instead takes on a crystalline presence, existing both within and without the system as the principle of its—rather than the subject's—annihilation" (153). Such a contention would appear to hint at an upcoming reading of *Disgrace,* or at least to pique our appetite for one. What we get, though, is a new section whose title redirects us to *Slow Man* and the corporeality of shame, but whose content swerves away once more to Sartre's somatic metaphors and Fanon's subsequent critique of Sartre's universalization of shame. The point of this segue, like others in this book, seems clear enough, but the interruptive effect is unavoidable. The novelist in question dissolves under the weight of theoretical rumination, the logic of Bewes's commentary producing not so much an argument as an infrastructure of conceptual resonances between different thinkers' uses of shame that defers rather than illuminates the ostensible literary object of attention. The primary works reenter the spotlight via block quotations—as in the half-page passage from *Dusklands* (157–58)—but Bewes misses the opportunity to offer more patient analyses of a rhetorical or narratological kind that might substantiate his sometimes imprecise notion of shame's formal components and consequences.

A more systematic account of what postcolonial writers formally *do,* and not just what they compositionally fail to do, might have also clarified the intriguing interrogation of perception with which Bewes draws to a close. He returns to Coetzee as an initial springboard here, noting that the "thematic presence of shame" in Coetzee's fiction might be apprehended as "an intimation that there is no positive dimension to writing, nor to intellectual activity in general, nor to any such index of the presence of man" (174). As gloomy as this sounds, Bewes suggests that at the same time shame provides a valuable "departure from the immediacy and instantaneity of pure perception." Switching media to film, this final chapter proceeds to offer a highly absorbing account of that departure

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via Louis Malle's *L'Inde fantôme* (1969), before circling back to the question that underpins much of the book's alignment of the limitations of the novel form with the negative affect named in its title: "How might one give adequate literary form to the shame of postcolonial existence?" (192). The answer Bewes offers is worth quoting in full, because it's not only provocative but also adversarial toward that very feature—namely, the perspectival and sensate simulation of interiority—which sets the novel apart from competing modes of representation:

> If for Sartre the purest embodiment of the free consciousness is the writer, for Deleuze the free consciousness is found not in the writer at all, but in the machine, the camera. If a truly postcolonial writing is to evolve, a writing unburdened by the shame of its partiality and inadequacy, the lessons of Malle's *L'Inde fantôme* and of Deleuze's works on cinema are that it will take the form of a machinic writing, a form that is already in development. Such a writing is crystallized whenever an instance or a detail of the work cannot be explained in terms of the apprehension of an object by a perceiving, writing subject; or whenever the opacity of an anchored consciousness is felt, within the work, as the condition of its truth. At such moments, the postcolonial writing to come is already visible, sensible: a writing freed from the shaming, subtractive consciousness of a being who writes. (192)

This concluding sequence raises more issues than I can rigorously engage here. However, at least a couple of points stand out for scrutiny. The first is the question of how consistently and systematically we can tell the difference between a novel's implied "perceiving, writing subject"—to say nothing of the question of how far Bewes is willing to conflate a novel's "writing subject" with the provenance and stance of its focalizing perceiver—and the kind of "anchored consciousness" that would be familiar to readers of Faulkner or James. Which leads to the second point: if we ought to recognize the need to tell the difference in the first place, why is it urgent that we do so *now*? That's to say, what is it about the advances (and not merely the deficiencies) peculiar to *contemporary* fiction that commands this recognition? To put it another way, Bewes's prospectus for the future of shame-less postcolonial writing rests on the assumption that the depersonalization of narrative discourse is an inherently ethical strategy with imminently liberating consequences. But why should a

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mode of narration stripped of all subjective inflection, inoculated against the principle of focalization, and aspiring instead to the impartiality of the camera eye (an impartiality as impossible as the impersonality of writing modeled on machinery) be *necessarily* more ethically responsive and responsible? How can such prose be any less of a symptom of the very shame that might motivate postcolonial writers to opt for such depersonalizing tactics in the first place? And the desire for "machinic writing" per se is hardly unprecedented: standing in stylistic opposition to the sensuous, multiperspectival impressionism of James and Woolf, the externalism of Wyndham Lewis's fiction, for instance, is as closely modeled to the machine as you can get. What's more, Lewis's register does little to dissolve that link between the aggressive sensibility of his writing and the "consciousness of a being who writes."

But literary-historical counterpoints aside, the implications of Bewes's conclusion might make us wonder, on a more general scale, what claims are left to make about fiction's critical efficacy once we've disparaged its capacity to evoke perception in the course of forging alternative modes of seeing and acting toward the world. I'm reminded here of Gayatri Spivak's comments on the politics of focalization in her own careful reading of *Disgrace,* where she endorses the potential, albeit not fully realized by Coetzee, of the novel's "rhetorical signal to the active reader, to counterfocalize" (22). If, as Spivak suggests, that "provocation into counterfocalization is the 'political' in political fiction," then it would seem all the more important to find new ways of conceptualizing the novel's ability to turn us into "active" readers of the very perceptual dynamics it both simulates and interrogates, rather than reducing perception to a symptom of writerly shame for which the only remedy is a form of mechanized narration. Spivak offers an especially delicate consideration of *Disgrace*'s depiction of Lucy, who is refracted by the free indirect discourse mediated largely by David Lurie. In light of this mediation, Spivak suggests that literature's "task" is to provoke a degree of "displacement," whereby the active reader will become alert to "the remote possibility of the precarious production of an infrastructure that can in turn produce a Lucy or her focalizer, figuring forth an equality that takes disgrace in its stride" (30). As I understand her, Spivak is not simply suggesting that we also need Lucy's point of view; she admires the novel too much to insinuate that it might've benefited from such a crudely democratizing effort, on Coetzee's part, to rebalance the allocation of narrative perspectives. Rather, Spivak

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implies that we need to find more sophisticated and interactive ways of reading precisely the kind of perceptual "immediacy and instantaneity" about which Bewes voices such reservations, especially when the most innovative novelists of our time are simulating perception not merely in a modernist fashion of rendering mental process but as a means of involving us as participatory readers in the critical work narrative form itself carries out.

Because such simulations are more symptomatic than they are productive for Bewes, he tends to forestall the sort of inquiry to which Spivak gestures, implying instead something of a double bind for the novelist and critic alike. For just as the postcolonial writer is prone to disclosing her complicity in the reproduction of modes of perception originally enabled and perpetuated by colonialism, so the critic—in approaching "shame not as an affect but as a principle of reading, one profoundly at odds with its own concept" (55)—must ask herself "to what extent is the very acknowledgement of shame at the history of colonialism a shameful act, destined further to expand the circuit of shame? And if shame itself is snared in implication, what possibilities exist for a literary form that might be adequate to the ethical complexity of the postcolonial world?" (12). As the reader may have noticed from a quotation from p. 192 above, these questions here are recycled in tenor and substance in only slightly modified terms, a testament to this book's recursive quality. Some level of recursion is to be expected, though, in a book that so insistently absorbs its different writers within a unifying framework that threatens to elide their particularity.

But particularity isn't the objective here; as noted earlier, failure and inadequacy loom large instead. Within its own parameters, this rumination on negativity succeeds with some elegance and persuasion, notably in the eloquent chapter that rereads Naipaul through Adorno's lens of "late style." But with the exception of that incisive discussion of modal and historical belatedness, Bewes's overriding inclination is to take writerly incapacity—rather than vigor or virtuosity—as a given. The "worthlessness or inadequacy of writing" (19) is established as constitutively inevitable, an irredeemable aspect of the creative process. Bewes may well insist at the outset that "shame is peculiarly resistant to the logic of symptomatology" (22), but in practice the detection of shaming affects as so ubiquitous within if not endemic to postcolonial writing produces precisely that symptomatology—a default critical position that sidelines all positivities in its single-minded pursuit of a novelist's deficiencies.

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Shame may well evade "cause and effect" explanations, but that doesn't stop Bewes from rendering visible shame's behavior as a "complex" to be diagnosed, even if its contradictions refuse to be resolved. Indeed, without such literary critical diagnostics, his argument would be rather more descriptive. As it is, he can pinpoint, with great flair, indicators of underlying maladies that in turn allow him to uncover—without offering remedies for—the way the "*logic* of shame, considered as an affect that volatilizes its linguistic and conceptual forms, requires that we give up categories predicated upon the centrality and sovereignty of the human, in all their explanatory power" (143). This interrogation of categorical habits is one of the greatest achievements of this book. All the more a pity, then, that with respect to the poetics and politics of narrative perception, Bewes ends up diminishing the very elements of novelistic form through which he deciphers the instantiations and paradoxes of postcolonial shame, emphasizing fiction's generic impoverishment over its enduring promise. This book could well be offering us, as John Marx's cover endorsement claims, "the theory of the contemporary novel that literary scholars have been craving." But when the novel's inventiveness comes to be seen, wherever you look, as dominated or hindered by the same temperament, such a theory—courting as it does the very pathologies of failure that Bewes so diligently seeks to avoid—no longer seems capacious enough to consider contemporary literature's radical potential on its own terms. Compelling, probing, and conceptually masterful, this study nevertheless leaves you wondering whether, deep down, Bewes longs for the novel itself to become something other than it is.

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Nature, the Individual, and the Market in Norris and Dreiser

Peter E. Collins

The essays in Herbert Spencer's 1884 treatise on politics and economics, *The Man Versus the State,* combine two justifications of the free market, each of which also involves a specific view of nature. The first, a staple of classical liberalism, is the claim that a free market is conducive to liberty. Spencer decries the decrease in freedom he sees as concomitant with the creation of Poor Laws (among other government intrusions into the economy), declaring "The life of a society . . . depends on maintenance of individual rights" (164), while excoriating "those who, denying natural rights, commit themselves to the assertion that rights are artificially created by law" (165). Highlighting Spencer's importance to American thought, Richard Hofstadter writes, "Spencer's doctrines were imported into the Republic long after individualism had become a national tradition. Yet in the expansive age of our industrial culture he became the spokesman of that tradition, and his contribution materially swelled the stream of individualism if it did not change its course" (50).

Alongside Spencer's classical liberalism and individualism dwell his more Darwinian justifications for an anti-regulation agenda. Describing London's poor as "good-for-nothings, who in one way or another live on good-for-somethings," Spencer asks, "Is it natural that happiness should be the lot of such? or is it natural that they should bring unhappiness on themselves and those connected with them?" (80–81). He then blames the proliferation of the poor on the Poor Laws. Spencer later returns to this point, expressing it in explicitly Darwinian terms:

> The process of "natural selection," as Mr. Darwin called it, co-operating with a tendency to variation and to inheritance of variations, he has shown to be a chief cause . . . of that evolution

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> through which all living things, beginning with the lowest and diverging and re-diverging as they evolved, have reached their present degrees of organization and adaptation to their modes of life. So familiar has this truth become that some apology seems needed for naming it. And yet, strange to say, now that this truth is recognized by most cultivated people—now that the beneficent working of the survival of the fittest has been so impressed on them that, much more than people in past times, they might be expected to hesitate before neutralizing its action—now more than ever before in the history of the world, are they doing all they can to further survival of the unfittest! (131)

Spencer's two modes of rhetorical assault on government regulation thus suggest a harmony between Darwinism and the individualism of classical liberalism. Just as it is ethically wrong to force people to give charity through government welfare programs, such intervention is also deleterious to the proper functioning of evolution. *The Man Versus the State* thus argues that natural liberty and the dictates of Darwinian nature are in perfect agreement—that, in fact, each reinforces the other.

The fate of individualism and liberty in Darwinian nature is not, however, as clear cut as *The Man Versus the State* would have it. In fact, much of American naturalism adopts a version of Darwinian nature that is deeply antithetical to the individual. In "The Law of Life," for example, Jack London writes that nature "ha[s] no concern for that concrete thing called the individual. Her interest lay in the species, the race" (40). Such a view is inherently in tension with classical liberalism's belief in "natural rights." If nature does not care about the individual, then the empowerment of the individual through a system of liberty and rights cannot be of interest to nature. Whereas Spencer sees nature's inherent predilection for competition as empowering to the individual, who is freed from the compulsion to support "good-for-nothings" whose poverty proves their unfitness for economic competition, London's "The Law of Life" holds that the individual is of no importance whatsoever.

In their works most explicitly concerned with economics Frank Norris and Theodore Dreiser both address the fate of the individual in a marketplace that they construe as fundamentally natural. Because this fate is not a liberating one, at least not on the scale of the individual, Norris's *The Octopus* and *The Pit* and the first two novels in Dreiser's *Trilogy of*

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Desire draw attention to the rhetorical slipperiness of nature as an economic trope. In effect, they disentangle Darwinian nature from liberalism's insistence that *laissez-faire* economics are liberating to the individual, and in so doing suggest a problem with classical liberalism that, during the Progressive Era, would increasingly become central to American liberalism.

One caveat, before continuing. Numerous critics have discussed Spencer's influence on naturalist writers, particularly Dreiser, typically drawing primarily from Spencer's evolutionary theory rather than his more overtly economic works—though as the above paragraphs suggest, these two aspects of Spencer's work are not independent. Rather than taking up the question of this influence per se, however, I concentrate on the ways in which works by Norris and Dreiser draw attention to the difficulties inherent in conflating a Darwinian model of the natural world with individualism and the idea of natural rights. This is not an argument, that is, about authorial intention, and that Dreiser read and respected Spencer's evolutionary theory isn't germane to my argument. Instead, I argue that the works of Norris and Dreiser, intentionally or not, portray the effects of the natural market as chaotic and destructive at the individual level—a portrayal, I will argue, very much in line with how Darwin describes nature, but at odds with how nature is decribed in economic theory that celebrates the free market.

"The individual suffers, but the race goes on": The individual and the aggregate in *The Octopus* and *The Pit*

In *The Wealth of Nations,* Adam Smith applies the term "nature" to the market frequently but somewhat haphazardly. Smith describes at various points the "natural price" of commodities (52–59; bk 1, ch. 7), the "natural progress of opulence" as nations become progressively wealthier over time in a natural market (292–95; bk. 3, ch. 1), and the "natural liberty" of people to do business. The concept of "natural liberty" is particularly central to his theories. Smith first uses this phrase while discussing the effect on wages of England's laws restricting movement between parishes (86–119; bk. 1, ch. 10); this restriction of the "natural liberty" to move

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around, he claims, causes the discrepancy in wages across different areas of England. The idea of "natural liberty" continues to appear in various forms throughout *The Wealth of Nations,* and was important to Americans' understanding of Smith's work. In the introduction to a 1910 reprint of Smith's treatise, the American economist Edwin R. A. Seligman writes, "The two fundamental ideas of *The Wealth of Nations* are those of self-interest and natural liberty" (vii). Throughout *The Wealth of Nations,* Smith uses the word "natural" to signify anything working in a harmonious and ordered fashion. The market is "natural" so long as it regulates itself (or is regulated by Smith's most famous abstraction, the "invisible hand"), and thus anything that interferes with the market's operations becomes unnatural. Most famously, excessive government regulation and control is unnatural, but Smith is actually not as dogmatically opposed to government as some of his later disciples, so at times he describes other institutions—for instance, monopolies—as interfering with market processes, while he finds government run infrastructure and educational systems unproblematic.[1] The only consistent rule is that something is natural insofar as it orders the market and unnatural insofar as it disorders the market. Thus nature is conceived as orderly, while certain elements of human society, produce disorder. Smith's use of "natural," however, is largely tautological—we know that the market is behaving naturally when it is behaving as it ought to be behaving, and that it is behaving as it ought to be when it is free from unnatural interference, a terminological circularity reflecting that *The Wealth of Nations* has more in common with moral philosophy than natural science. Smith's stake in the word natural comes not when he discusses the natural price of commodities, then, but when he examines the natural liberty to do business. What is axiomatic is that we are free by nature.

Only a couple decades after Adam Smith published *The Wealth of Nations,* Thomas Malthus wrote the first edition of his influential *An Essay on the Principle of Population,* a treatise on nature and economics more firmly rooted in observations of the natural world. The only way to limit the spread of poverty among humans, he argues, is to sharply curtail population growth. Malthus in turn influenced Charles Darwin, who, in *The Origin of Species,* writes that Natural Selection is "the doctrine of Malthus, applied to the whole animal and vegetable kingdom" (5). Unlike Smith, however, Darwin does not equate nature with order. In describing Darwin's work, Elizabeth Grosz casts him as a scientist who longs for the

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certainty of Newtonian physics, while grappling with the uncertainty of biology and ecology. As Grosz puts it, for Darwin "Life is construed as a confrontation with the accidental as well as the expected, a consequence of the random as well as the predictable" (7). When Darwin defines natural selection he writes that, owing to the struggle for existence,

> variations, however slight and from whatever cause proceeding, if they be in any degree profitable to the individuals of a species, in their infinitely complex relations to other organic beings and to their physical conditions of life, will tend to the preservation of such individuals, and will generally be inherited by the offspring. The offspring, also, will thus have a better chance of surviving, for, of the many individuals of any species which are periodically born, but a small number can survive. I have called this principle, by which each slight variation, if useful, is preserved, by the term Natural Selection. (61)

In this passage Darwin acknowledges that a greater level of individual fitness does not provide an organism with any guarantees. His language constantly equivocates, noting that useful traits "tend" to be preserved, that such traits will "generally" be passed along, and that creatures with beneficial mutations will "have a better chance" than those without. The struggle to survive and reproduce is like a poker game—skill helps, but so does luck. All evolution does is give some organisms better odds than others. And yet, Darwin ends the passage by suggesting an absolute truth rather than an equivocal possibility—"each slight variation, if useful, is preserved."

Darwin reconciles chance with certainty by looking at large populations over long periods of time. For instance, when discussing the circumstances favorable to evolution, Darwin identifies the importance of a "large number of individuals" in a particular ecosystem, which "by giving a better chance within any given period for the appearance of profitable variations . . . is, I believe, a highly important element of success" (97). Similarly, Darwin explains the importance of a long period of time to the operation of evolution: "Lapse of time . . . gives a better chance of beneficial variations arising and of their being selected, accumulated, and fixed" (100). In both cases, the large sample size generated either by a big population or a population over a long period of time smoothes over the unpredictability of individual lives. As a result, evolutionary changes

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in population only attain something like order when a population is examined in the aggregate, not when organisms are examined individually. Darwin makes this point clear when he discusses an article from the *North British Review*:

> The author takes the case of a pair of animals, producing during their lifetime two hundred offspring, of which, from various causes of destruction, only two on an average survive to procreate their kind. This is rather an extreme estimate for most of the higher animals, but by no means so for many of the lower organisms. He then shows that if a single individual were born, which varied in some manner, giving it twice as good a chance of life as that of the other individuals, yet the chances would be strongly against its survival. Supposing it to survive and to breed, and that half its young inherited the favourable variation; still, as the Reviewer goes on to show, the young would have only a slightly better chance of surviving and breeding; and this chance would go on decreasing in the succeeding generations. (87)

But while even a substantial increase in relative fitness gives an organism only a slight increase in its chances of survival—too slight, at least in the case of lower organisms, to account for evolution—Darwin goes on to explain that "certain rather strongly marked variations, which no one would rank as mere individual differences, frequently recur owing to a similar organisation being similarly acted on. In cases of this kind, if the variation were of a beneficial nature, the original form would soon be supplanted by the modified form, through the survival of the fittest" (88). Here Darwin draws a distinction between the effects of Natural Selection at the individual level, and its effects at the communal level. Individually, even fitness provides no substantial likelihood of survival, but if any beneficial variation occurs frequently enough throughout a population, it will eventually be selected for. Hence, natural selection becomes a stable, more predictable process only when examined in relation to an aggregate. Large populations, long periods of time, and frequently recurring mutations can lead to a slow and incremental species change. However, the fate of any individual being, fit or otherwise, remains subject to chance. Order exists only in statistical aggregates.[2] Smith's claim that individual liberty brings order to economic systems thus conflicts with Darwin's description of nature as destructive and chaotic on the individual level. For Darwin, nature

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is only visible as order from a perspective that transcends the individual, inhuman in its distance from the everyday experience of living. The short span of a human life renders people unable to experience the organization of nature, even if they can comprehend that order intellectually.

The contrast between the human experience of life as tragically disordered and the comprehension of a cosmic order that exceeds individual human lives is central to Norris's *The Octopus*. Critical discussions of *The Octopus* frequently center on the conflict between the bulk of the novel, which reads like an anti-monopoly polemic, and the novel's ending, in which the poet Presley comes to an understanding of the cosmic order that underlies the tragic events he has witnessed. Most of the novel describes the tribulations of a group of wheat farmers in California whose livelihood is threatened by a railroad monopoly. After a series of political defeats, the farmers finally resort to violence in an effort to stop the railroad's men from evicting them. In the ensuing battle, modeled after the Mussel Slough gunfight, the farmers are defeated, some of them get killed, and the monopoly triumphs in spite of the tremendous injustices it has wrought.

The novel's ending, however, complicates any reading of *The Octopus* as simply an anti-monopoly polemic. Presley, a friend of the farmers, goes to visit Shelgrim, the railroad's CEO. Presley intends to confront Shelgrim, but instead listens to a lecture from the unexpectedly sympathetic businessman in which Shelgrim denies his own agency in the actions that have destroyed the farmers:

> try to believe this—to begin with—*that Railroads build themselves.* Where there is a demand sooner or later there will be a supply. Mr. Derrick, does he grow his wheat? The Wheat grows itself. What does he count for? Does he supply the force? What do I count for? Do I build the Railroad? You are dealing with forces, young man, when you speak of Wheat and the Railroads, not with men. There is the Wheat, the supply. It must be carried to feed the People. There is the demand. The Wheat is one force, the Railroad, another, and there is the law that governs them—supply and demand. Men have only little to do in the whole business. (576)

Shelgrim compares the growth of the railroad to the growth of wheat, a sort of natural miracle that may be enabled by humans but that is ulti-

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mately the result not of human agency but of natural forces. Under such a view the monopoly is merely the actualization of the law of supply and demand, recast by Shelgrim as not just the rule that governs the free market but as a law of nature. Shelgrim compares himself to the wheat farmer who "can burn his crop, or he can give it away, or sell it for a cent a bushel—just as I could go into bankruptcy—but otherwise his Wheat must grow," and ends by asking "Can any one stop the Wheat? Well, then no more can I stop the Road." Beholden to the people who own railroad stock, Shelgrim casts himself as just as much a pawn of nature as the farmers. This point of view initially shocks Presley, but the poet eventually accepts at least some of Shelgrim's argument and realizes that the wheat must, indeed, continue to flow. Presley ends the novel with the realization that "*the* WHEAT *remained*. Untouched, unassailable, undefiled, that mighty world-force, that nourisher of nations, wrapped in Nirvanic calm, indifferent to the human swarm, gigantic, resistless, moved onward in its appointed grooves . . . the individual suffers, but the race goes on" (651–52).

The ending of *The Octopus* frequently dissatisfies critics, who find in it an odd and often displeasing change of tone from what comes before it. Presley's final realization could be taken as an exculpation of the railroad monopoly, an affirmation that it is, in fact, an inevitable part of nature as Shelgrim claims, and thus something that transcends categories of right and wrong. This reading, however, ignores the great lengths towards which the narrative goes to depict the suffering wrought by Shelgrim's monopoly. Alternately, Donald Pizer reads the ending as an expression of Norris's evolutionary theism, which allowed him to "dramatize natural laws with greater emphasis on racial and social benefits than on individual destruction" (*Frank Norris* 114). Because evolutionary theism is utilitarian in its moral outlook, the novel can ultimately overlook the individual tragedies of the farmers. The greater good has been served, and the wheat continues to flow. Under such a reading, Pizer explains, Presley's views crystallize into three stages:

> Presley's preoccupation with individual tragedy and his personal involvement hinder him from achieving the "larger view." This is his earlier, moral attitude. However, led by his second perception of the wheat and by Shelgrim, he formulates an amoral, impersonal conception of force. This too fails to answer his doubts. It is

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> only with the return to a moral position, now on a cosmic level, that he achieves the "larger view" and Truth. (139–40)

Pizer goes on to note that while Presley's conclusion is "logically consistent within the religious core of the novel," on an emotional level it "lack[s] validity" (146). That is to say, if *The Octopus*'s message is that it is acceptable for the individual to be sacrificed to the greater good, the continuation of the race, then the novel is an aesthetic failure because it still provokes an emotional attachment to the individuals destroyed. Their ruined lives do not seem acceptable sacrifices for Presley's abstractions. Leaving aside questions of aesthetic merit and authorial intention, however, what Pizer's analysis suggests is that the novel illustrates a tension between individual suffering and aggregate progress, then fails to resolve that tension. This has frustrated many critics of *The Octopus,* who have typically dealt with it either by dismissing Presley's final vision as merely Presley's vision, and not the novel's vision, by accepting (as Pizer does) that the novel is, on some level, a failure, or by suggesting that the novel accidentally points to an internal contradiction in efforts to naturalize the market.[3]

Rather than see Presley's last thoughts as a statement of the novel's thesis, we might instead view them as a statement of the novel's central tension—the tension between individual suffering and the continuation of the race. The continuation of the race involves the creation of capitalist markets that follow the law of supply and demand—which the novel accepts as a law of nature—but these same markets have little regard for individuals and may quickly and brutally sweep them away. Norris's novel thus sees nature in a manner quite close to Darwin. At the individual level everything appears dysfunctional and chaotic. There is no justice, and lives are destroyed without apparent reason. The order of things only comes into focus when we look at nature as an aggregate in which individuals matter very little. At this aggregate level everything continues to run in a manner that ensures the continuation of both the market and the race. Such a view aligns with evolutionary theism's utilitarian ethics, but because *The Octopus*'s primary focus up until the end rests on the suffering of the individual farmers, the novel draws attention to the human cost of this model of economic progress.

While Shelgrim's view of the world is an aggregate view, Norris presents his foil in the farmer Derrick, head of the league of farmers

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combating the monopoly. The narrator describes Magnus Derrick as "always ready to take chances, to hazard everything on the hopes of colossal returns . . . there was no more redoubtable poker player in the county. . . The old-time spirit of '49, hap-hazard, unscientific, persisted in his mind. Everything was a gamble—who took the greatest chances was most apt to be the greatest winner" (64–65). Derrick is a gambler and a gold prospector at heart, "willing to play for colossal stakes, to hazard a fortune on the chance of winning a million" (298). When he decides to gamble on politics and bribe some key people in order to influence the upcoming selection of members for the railroad commission, he soon finds himself blackmailed: "Gambler that he was, he had at last chanced his highest stake, his personal honor, in the greatest game of his life, and had lost" (461). The triumph of Shelgrim and the railroad is thus the triumph of the monopoly over the lone gambler. Norris consistently connects Derrick to the west and to the frontier spirit, and the suggestion here is that the old, every-man-for-himself spirit of individualism that fueled westward expansion cannot stand up to the monolithic power of big business. The distinction also recapitulates the distinction in Darwin between the functioning of chance at the individual level and order at the aggregate level, though the distinction functions somewhat differently for Norris. For Norris, in *The Octopus,* the monopoly is large enough to overcome the workings of chance, though at the cost of individual livelihoods.

In *The Pit,* Norris revisits the role of the market in disrupting the lives of individuals, this time without recourse to Presley's optimistic utilitarianism. The novel opens by invoking a typical Victorian marriage plot. Laura Dearborn has just moved to Chicago, and is faced with three suitors trying to win her hand in marriage: an ambitious young boy named Landry Court, an artist named Sheldon Corthell, and a businessman named Curtis Jadwin. Laura never takes Landry's attentions seriously, rendering the pursuit of Laura's hand a competition between art (Corthell) and business (Jadwin). This conflict is highlighted by the novel's opening scene, in which Laura goes to the opera to see a performance of Gounod's *Faust*. Enthralled by the beauty of the music, she closes her eyes and dreams about love, explicitly contrasting a chivalric conception of life to "the sordid, material modern life" (*Pit* 22). "But a discordant element develop[s]" as Laura hears some nearby businessmen discuss the recent collapse of Helmick, who has just failed in an attempt to corner wheat. Furthering the contrast between art (which the novel associates

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with chivalry and the past) and business (which the novel associates with the present, modern world) Jadwin is a self-made man, raised from relative poverty through his business acumen, while Corthell comes from old money. Laura's eventual decision to marry Jadwin rather than Corthell thus appears to affirm business and modernity over the romantically conceived past.[4]

The novel, however, does not end with Jadwin and Laura happily married. Rather, what would be the end of *The Pit* were it a traditional marriage plot is only the midway point. Aside from one early chapter in which Jadwin engages in some minor wheat speculation, and the discussion of Helmick's failed corner at the opera, business concerns remain largely absent from the novel's first half. But the second half, which picks up after Laura and Jadwin have married, is split almost equally between discussions of Laura's unhappy home life and of Jadwin's efforts to corner wheat. As Jadwin falls deeper into speculation, Laura feels progressively more abandoned and considers committing adultery with Corthell. In effect, the business novel inserts itself into the marriage novel, disrupting its logic. The structure of *The Pit* thus suggests business as a disordering element in the lives of individuals.

Traditionally, the marriage plot links the institution of marriage to civic order. The resolution of relationships into monogamous, heterosexual pairs corresponding to a hierarchical model of society at large signifies the appropriateness of that patriarchal hierarchy. If the order and stability of the family are the foundation of the order and stability of the country as a whole, then, the disruption of the marriage plot in *The Pit* ought also to be the disruption of civic order. This is not quite the case, however. As with *The Octopus, The Pit* draws a distinction between the dysfunction of the economy at the level of the individual and its ordered functioning in the aggregate. The workings of the economy disrupt and ruin individual lives, but it does not destroy society. Suggestively, then, when Jadwin brings his co-speculator, Gretry, to see his personal art collection, Gretry comments about one painting that up close "it's just a lot of little daubs" (199) but that, from a distance, it comes into focus and makes sense. As with Presley's observations about the suffering of the individual, Gretry's aesthetic commentary reveals a tension in the novel between the way things look to characters who are too close to them and the way they look to those who can step back and view them from a distance.

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The Pit's central metaphor—that the Chicago wheat pit is a "vortex" (259), "whirlpool" (373), or "maelstrom" (402)—plays explicitly with the idea that businessmen get sucked into speculation and lose sight of the larger picture. Initially imagining Chicago as "like a great tidal wave," Laura thinks, "It's all very well for the individual just so long as he can keep afloat, but once fallen, how horribly quick it would crush him, annihilate him, how horribly quick and with such horrible indifference" (63). As the novel progresses, Jadwin enters the vortex, and although he initially believes he can control it, his attempt to corner the wheat market drives the price of wheat so high that farmers all over the country plant more wheat than they have ever planted before. And the price plummets. The narrator describes the backlash against Jadwin's corner as though nature itself were turning against Jadwin:

> The Wheat had broken from his control. For months, he had, by the might of his single arm, held it back; but now it rose like the upbuilding of a colossal billow. It towered, towered, hung poised for an instant, and then, with a thunder as of the grind and crash of chaotic worlds, broke upon him, burst through the Pit and raced past him, on and on to the eastward and to the hungry nations. (392)

Initially, Jadwin is proud of his vision, his ability to "see" what wheat prices will do, as when he tells Gretry, "the rest of the Bear crowd don't seem to see it, but I see it. Before fall we're going to have higher prices" (195). As he ventures into the maelstrom, however, his vision falters. Thus Jadwin's final act as a speculator is to venture into the pit while his corner is collapsing, yelling that he wants to buy, until he suffers a nervous collapse. Outside the pit, he can predict which way wheat prices are headed, but as he gets more and more personally involved in speculative ventures his vision dissolves.

We might wonder why, in *The Octopus,* the railroad monopoly succeeds, appearing as an implacable, natural force, while in *The Pit* Jadwin's attempted monopolization of the wheat is doomed to fail. The key lies in the difference between Shelgrim and Jadwin. Shelgrim evacuates his own agency (becomes simply a "shell") in order to become a mere extension of the railroad. He believes that to be head of the railroad is to respect it as a force of nature in its own right, one that must grow on its own terms, just as wheat must grow. Jadwin, in contrast, sees his wheat corner as a

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source of personal power—he is consistently compared to a great general fighting the "Battle of the Streets," and is repeatedly called "Napoleonic." In fact, Jadwin is far more like Magnus Derrick than he is like Shelgrim. The lone speculator, like the lone gambler or prospector, has little chance of survival.

Compounding this vision of his own power, Jadwin consistently supposes he is the master of chance. Inititially, he speculates on wheat because Gretry claims to have a sure way to make money, explaining to him "this ain't speculation. You can see for yourself how sure it is. . . .Look here, J., you aren't the man to throw money away. You'd buy a business block if you knew you could sell it over again at a profit" (86). At first, Jadwin tries to resist the allure of speculation, but finally he gives in:

> In spite of himself he felt a Chance had come. Again that strange sixth sense of his, the inexplicable instinct, that only the born speculator knows, warned him. Every now and then during the course of his business career, this intuition came to him, this *flair*, this intangible, vague premonition, this presentiment that he must seize Opportunity or else Fortune, that so long had stayed at his elbow, would desert him. In the air about him he seemed to feel an influence, a sudden new element, the presence of a new force. It was Luck, the great power, the great goddess, and all at once it had stooped from out the invisible, and just over his head passed swiftly in a rush of glittering wings. (87)

Jadwin flips a coin to decide whether or not he will join with Gretry, certain it will come up heads—and it does. Initially, Jadwin's belief that fortune follows patterns he can discern and master seems well-founded, and the deal works out well due to "Jadwin's luck—the never-failing guardian of the golden wings" (110). Mimicking Gretry's language, Jadwin explains to his friend Cressler that, "this wasn't speculating. . . . .It was a certainty. It was found money." In contrast, however, when another group of investors draws Cressler in by promising him that "there won't be much speculating" (274) involved in their sure thing, Cressler ends up losing his money and committing suicide. Cressler's failure serves as a reminder that luck cannot be eliminated from speculation, and Jadwin's failure, though slow in coming, demonstrates he is no more protected than Cressler from the uncontrollable forces of the maelstrom. While Norris's whirlpool is a destructive force, however, like *The Octopus, The Pit* ends asserting that

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order nonetheless still operates—that is, that the market still functions. The wheat that Jadwin's corner had been damming up is allowed to flow freely again, and the laws of supply and demand are again fulfilled.

To a certain extent, then, Norris appears to affirm the free market, naturalizing it, and in particular naturalizing the laws of supply and demand. Furthermore, he suggests that nature will rebalance any temporary aberrations that hinder the functioning of those laws. Whatever local difficulties might arise—cornered markets or local disputes between farmers and railroads—the market eventually smoothes them over. In contrast to Presley's epiphany that the market works, though, *The Pit* ends with Laura's despair and bafflement: "For a moment, vague, dark perplexities assailed her, questionings as to the elemental forces, the forces of demand and supply that ruled the world. This huge resistless Nourisher of the Nations—why was it that it could not reach the People, could not fulfill its destiny, unmarred by all this suffering, unattended by all this misery?" (420). The individual suffering Presley learns to accept remains for Laura a source of consternation. And her "dark perplexities" seem more responsive than his final optimism to the central problem represented in the two novels: the "natural" market has no interest in individual liberty or natural rights. Such a vision of the market is indeed largely Darwinian—more Darwinian, in fact, than Spencerian—but it rejects rather than affirms liberal individualism.

"The element of chance that faces us all": luck, and Dreiser's contextualization of fitness

While *The Octopus* and *The Pit* disrupt the ideological association of nature with individual liberty, Dreiser's *The Financier,* and to a lesser degree its sequel, *The Titan,* routes its concern for the individual more specifically through the concept of evolutionary fitness. Near the beginning of *The Financier,* in what is probably the most frequently analyzed scene in the novel, Cowperwood sees a lobster and a squid together in a tank at the fish market. Day after day, the lobster attacks the squid, slowly wearing it down and slicing it up, until eventually it manages to kill its prey. In this battle, the young Cowperwood sees the answer to the question "'How is life organized?' Things lived on each other—that was it" (8).[5] Applying this vision to human society, Cowperwood realizes that men live on other

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men—that the strong live on the weak. His conclusion explicitly forestalls any possibility that chance could have changed the outcome: "The squid couldn't kill the lobster—he had no weapon. The lobster could kill the squid—he was heavily armed. . . . What was the result to be? What else could it be? He didn't have a chance."

But what is, for Cowperwood, a fairly straightforward lesson about survival of the fittest has not been quite so straightforward for critics. Some have read it just as Cowperwood does, as an example of the novel's amoral world where the fit survive and the unfit perish.[6] Others—most notably Walter Benn Michaels—have read the scene as fundamentally misleading, claiming that the novel consistently inserts chance into its universe, disrupting the smooth functioning of natural selection that Cowperwood believes he observes. While "nothing in Dreiser's work provides a better example of" his "susceptibility" to Spencer's ideas "than the allegory of the lobster and the squid," Michaels argues that this view of nature does not adequately explain "the events of *The Financier* itself, which persistently exhibit nature not primarily as an organizing force dedicated to the survival of the fittest but as the ultimate measure of life's instability" (76). Michaels continues, "the business crisis, understood by Dreiser as an essentially natural phenomenon, cannot be mastered or even predicted by any system of thought, any account of life's 'organization'—theological, scientific, even economic" (77). As a result, "Cowperwood's whole career is a glorification of chance, and the constant lesson of *The Financier* is that accidents will happen" (78). If the squid has no chance, the stock market, ruled as it is by "unheralded storms out of clear skies" (*Financier* 201), is a place where even fit individuals find no guarantees.[7] But if Michaels reads the operations of chance in *The Financier* as challenging the idea of fitness, chance is, as I've noted, fundamental to Darwin's description of nature. Furthermore, Michaels's conclusion that "Nature in *The Financier* is the speculator's ally" (83) because it guarantees the uncertainty on which the speculator gambles itself actually suggests an idea of fitness. As Alison Shonkwiler writes, Cowperwood is exceptional precisely because "he is able to register the 'natural' economic pressures around him" (58). That is to say, it is this knowing how to make effective use of his ally, nature, that constitutes his fitness.

Other critics have noted that the glass aquarium is not a natural environment at all. Just as Cowperwood operates as a financier in a world of government favoritism and uneven playing fields, the squid has no chance

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only because the confines of the fish market construct things that way. "In nature, the squid had a chance of escaping," Bruce Robbins argues, but "it has no chance here precisely because this competition is not natural but man-made. It's not that life *is* organized, but that it has *been* organized in a particular way" (122).[8] Again, though, *The Financier* is seen not to deny the law of the survival of the fittest, but rather to see fitness operating in particular contexts. A product of evolution just like the lobster, the squid is after all not absolutely unfit. It is simply unfit to share a small glass tank with one of its natural predators.

Dreiser addresses the relationship between context and fitness explicitly in "The Factor Called Chance," published in the posthumous volume *Notes on Life*. In it, he explains how chance plays into the success or failure of individuals:

> Somewhere, we may assume, and it may be true, that for each individual male or female, there exists the right environment, or stimuli, for his particular temperament. Also, somewhere the most harmful environment or collection of stimuli. And either—should he chance to meet up with and be controlled by it—would be or prove his fate. By the one, he would be greatly furthered, developed, made most effective, by the other least so, his natural powers whatever they might be would be frustrated or destroyed. And this is the element of chance that faces us all. (40)

Here, the world is split not into the fit and the unfit, but rather into those who fit their particular surroundings and those who do not. Some people may indeed be more fit than others for survival in a particular market economy—but change the way the economy functions and those same individuals may "be frustrated or destroyed" while others rise to the top. Any particular manifestation of the "free market"—which as the lobster and squid scene suggests is always really a constructed market—is no longer the only "natural" market formation capable of determining in absolute terms who is and who is not fit. Rather, it becomes one among any number of possible contexts, each of which determine an organism's fitness. This view is quite consistent with *The Man Versus the State*, which also accepts that society can be organized in ways unfriendly to *laissez-faire*. Indeed, central to Spencer's work was his concern that societies were organizing in ways that discouraged the competitive struggle he saw as salutary and natural. Rather than challenging the existence of fitness, then,

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Dreiser's work might better be read as a meditation on what sort of fitness is encouraged by a cutthroat competitive market. And this meditation turns on the question at the heart of *The Octopus* and *The Pit*: what is the fate of the individual under such a system?

At the outset of *The Financier*, Cowperwood believes strongly in the power of his own agency. His mantra—"I satisfy myself" (121)—expresses the individualist ethos of self-interest that Seligman praises as central to *The Wealth of Nations*. In an essay titled "The American Financier," however, Dreiser proves ambivalent about the financier as a symbol of individualism. Appearing to defend the financier against the "masses" who cry out for his downfall, Dreiser writes:

> Personally I believe that most of us would prefer that the mass should not sweep away the individual, for each of us would prefer to be somebody in however small a way rather than mere unrecognizable cogs in a machine or bees in a beehive. At best, we are little more than that; even our greatest individuals, individual as they may seem. They, too, are but minute factors in the total machinery, little able to forefend against disaster or the ultimate nothingness that swallows them. (83)

While celebrating the financier as an individual, thus, Dreiser also envisions individuals as not particularly individual, and sees that, in the grand scheme of nature, the financier is just "a highly specialized machine for the accomplishment of some end which Nature has in view" (74). Even as individualism suggests agency, Dreiser sees that nature governs everything, rendering human agency largely illusory.

Cowperwood first confronts the limits of his own agency when he becomes involved in the stock market. One of his early employers, Tighe, tells him, "I've seen breaks in stocks that you could never explain at all—no one could. It wouldn't be possible to find out why they broke" (39). As "This subtle world appealed to him [and] answered to his temperament" (40), Cowperwood seems to be one of those individuals lucky enough to have found the environment for which they are fit. At this point in the narrative, however, Cowperwood remains skeptical of the stock market:

> this buying and selling must be, and always was, incidental to the actual fact—the mine, the railroad, the wheat crop, the flour mill, and so on. Anything less than straight-out sales to realize quickly

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> on assets, or buying to hold as an investment, was gambling pure and simple, and these men were gamblers. He was nothing more than a gambler's agent. (42)

Although this state of affairs "was not troubling him any just at the moment," Cowperwood believes that "A Man, a real man, must never be an agent, a tool, or a gambler—acting for himself or for others—he must employ such. A real man—a financier—was never a tool. He used tools. He created. He led." Thus Cowperwood sets out a dichotomy, dividing "real men," who control their own fates, from "gamblers," whose fate is either at the mercy of chance or "agents" and "tools," who remain at the mercy of another, more powerful man. The real man is a creator, but not precisely in the sense of being a producer. While Cowperwood recognizes that stocks are "incidental" to the productive work of mines, railroads, and other such enterprises, he never seriously considers a career outside of finance. Based on his initial analysis of the market, however, and in light of the turbulent economy in the aftermath of the Civil War, he decides not to become a "stock gambler," but to pursue instead "bill-brokering, a business which he had observed to be very profitable and which involved no risk as long as one had capital" (46). Though he is tempermentally suited for it, Cowperwood's initial rejection of stock trading is thus specifically a reaction against the elements of risk and chance. The lobster cannot lose to the squid, but the stock market involves a substantial chance of failure, even for those who are best equipped for it.

Cowperwood changes his mind about the stock market only after he discovers—or believes he discovers—a way to render stock ventures secure and without risk. When Cowperwood is beginning as a financier, he follows the actions of the top finance firms closely, and quickly discovers one of the facets controlling the stock market: "He noticed how often a rich man's word sufficed—no money, no certificates, no collateral, no anything—just his word. If Drexel & Co., or Jay Cooke & Co., or Gould & Fiske were rumored to be behind anything, how secure it was!" (63). In light of this Cowperwood comes to believe, like *The Pit*'s Jadwin, that he can control, predict, and master the market. Such overconfidence leads to his ruin and incarceration for financial chicanery after the Chicago fire of 1871, but he remakes his fortune during the panic of 1873, which results, ironically, from the closure of Jay Cooke & Co.—one of the wealthy companies a word from which Cowperwood had once thought sufficient to render a venture secure. The puzzle the stock market presents to Cow-

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perwood is thus homologous to the one nature presents to Darwin: they both sense—or want to sense—some sort of underlying order, but on the individual level this order is never manifest.

Cowperwood's journey through the legal system drives this point home. He reflects that the law is "a place where the accidentally wounded were ground between the upper and the nether millstones of force or chance" (290–91), and Cowperwood's lawyer, Harper Steger, reiterates this viewpoint, telling the jury that "only the most unheralded and the unkindest thrust of fortune" has brought Cowperwood to the court, and adding that while he does not blame the court or the law, he does "condemn and deplore the untoward chain of events which has built up a seeming situation" (377). In jail, Cowperwood reflects that "unlike most men in his position" he has done nothing wrong and is "merely unfortunate" (386): he sits in his cell, "wondering what, in spite of his great ingenuity, was to become of him" (395–96). If Cowperwood embodies fitness for the stock market, then, this fitness in financial matters has still not secured him against all risk.

When Cowperwood's story picks up in *The Titan,* his rise, fall, incarceration, and rise again has taught him a valuable lesson: "He was sick of the stock exchange, anyhow, as a means of livelihood, and now decided that he would leave it once and for all" (1). He has come full circle at this point—as at the beginning of *The Financier*, Cowperwood is again leery of involving himself in an endeavor that leaves so much to chance. The stock market has turned out to be too little like the glass tank, where the game is rigged, that so impressed the young Cowperwood. And like Just as his attitude toward the stock market has shifted, Cowperwood has tempered his personal doctrine of self-satisfaction. In *The Titan,* when his wife Aileen asks him "You do everything you want, don't you?" Cowperwood responds, "Not quite . . . but it isn't for not wanting to. Chance has a little to say about some of these things" (24). He recognizes, that is, the difference between his own position and that of the lobster. He responds partly by accepting that his fitness doesn't mean he can fix events always in his favor, but also partly by looking for a way to change the game. Since the stock market could not be sufficiently rigged to avoid chance catastrophe, Cowperwood pursues instead a government granted monopoly, first in utilities then in streetcars. This attempt to play these rigged games ends in failure as well, however, when the people of Chicago rise up in rebellion against his stranglehold on the city, toppling his streetcar empire.

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Pizer reads the ending of *The Titan* as the enactment of Dreiser's "equation inevitable" (*Theodore Dreiser* 157–59). According to this "equation inevitable," nature balances out disruptions in power that swing society too far toward any particular "mood." Such a reading might be taken to support *laissez-faire,* as Jack E. Wallace suggests: "the real consequence of the mob's uprising in Chicago is . . . to support the argument for Social Darwinism. Such an argument must demonstrate that a free economic system, like the order of nature, protects itself against tyranny that might destroy competitive balance" (68). However, these events don't finally support a *laissez-faire* perspective. The very mechanism of government regulation which Dreiser shows protecting the "free economic system" itself violates the principle of economic *laissez-faire.* Moreover, *The Financier* and *The Titan* have already suggested that "the order of nature" is not order at all, at least not for those people caught up in its daily working. The popular uprising cannot defend order, because there is no order to defend. There are only different ways of organizing the market, different versions of the glass tank and the struggle that plays out inevitably within it.

Ultimately, the narrative's consistent refusal to render judgment on the events it describes suggests that *The Financier* and *The Titan* are best understood not as attacks on or defenses of either financiers like Cowperwood or the free market more generally, but as portrayals of the uncertain fate of the individual in a market where chance and chaos trump individual power. In "The American Financier," after describing the limited individuality of financiers like Cowperwood, Dreiser writes that "there is apparently in Nature no such thing as the right to do or the right not to do" (87)—precisely the antithesis of what Spencer argues in *The Man Versus the State.* While this might be taken to exonerate the amorality of financiers like Cowperwood, it does so by undermining any ethical justification for a market set up to give play to their self-interest. Whereas Spencer sees the survival of the fittest as a law of nature, harmonizing with man's "natural right" to determine how his property is disposed of, for Dreiser the right to property cannot be a natural right because there are no natural rights. Nature is no more than a chaotic field for various elements that each seek their own ends. In the interplay of these elements Dreiser renders Smith's invisible hand visible. The hand that places the lobster and the squid in a tank, sealing the squid's fate, seeks to create a context in which the lobster will be the more fit creature—though this is really for the gain of the merchant, not the lobster. Like the merchant in the fish market, Cowperwood seeks always to build a context amenable to his interests. His deal with the Philadelphia treasurer in *The Financier*

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and his bribery of public officials in *The Titan* are both attempts to manipulate the field in which he plays, to create a battleground in which his opponents, like the squid, will have no chance.

In *The Man Versus the State,* Spencer argues that a properly functioning society is dependent on properly functioning individuals, writing that "the welfare of a society and the justice of its arrangements are at bottom dependent on the characters of its members," and "the defective natures of citizens will show themselves in the bad acting of whatever social structure they are arranged into" (150). Spencer's analysis, which comes at the conclusion of his argument against Poor Laws, suggests that human fitness and a better society are mutually constitutive and thus that the goal of social reform should be to encourage fitness and weed out the unfit, not to help the unfit poor. Such a view, however, elides the fact that fitness is itself contextual rather than absolute. As Dreiser's novels suggest, any given version of the market is only one of many possible contexts, set up to ensure the fitness and survival of some and the destruction of others.

> The belief, not only of the socialists but also of those so-called Liberals who are diligently preparing the way for them, is that by due skill an ill-working humanity may be framed into well-working institutions. It is a delusion. The defective natures of citizens will show themselves in the bad acting of whatever social structure they are arranged into. (105)

Dreiser's novels suggest a rather different view of the working of evolutionary fitness. If any given version of the market is only one of many possible contexts, set up to ensure the fitness and survival of some and the destruction of others, then an examination of the market needs to ask what sort of fitness any given configuration promotes. Far from guaranteeing individual liberty, a competitive market modeled after Darwinian nature would offer little solace for the individual.

The free market in context

While Darwinian evolution, with its description of nature as inherently competitive, was easily appropriated as a justification for the free market, doing this risked describing a world antithetical to a culture that valued individualism. Spencer's *The Man Versus the State* attempts to contain this threat by attaching Darwinian natural selection to classical liberalism's notion of nature as an ordering and progressive force. As Darwin saw, though,

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"natural selection, or the survival of the fittest, does not necessarily include progressive development—it only takes advantage of such variations as arise and are beneficial to each creature under its complex relations of life" (120). That is to say, organisms simply evolve to fit their environment, whatever that may be, independent of questions of "progress." The works of Norris and Dreiser remain powerful today because, while they accept the capitalist market as natural, they do so by highlighting why such a market ultimately became problematic to liberalism in America. In their works, nature is no friend of the individual, and no friend of liberal individualism. Railroads, futures markets, and stock markets provide the context for struggles in which the individual isn't affirmed but, rather, rendered powerless.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, this was a message many Americans were ready to hear. The old connections between liberalism and *laissez-faire* capitalism were beginning to come undone, as movements like Woodrow Wilson's New Freedom sought to redefine freedom as not just freedom from a tyrannical government, but freedom from tyrannical corporate powers as well. Mourning the passing of the individual, Wilson wrote, "Yesterday, and ever since history began, men were related to one another as individuals. . . . To-day, the everyday relationships of men are largely with great impersonal concerns, with organizations, not with other individual men" (6–7). The "great impersonal concerns" Wilson worried about were large trusts, like the railroad trust in *The Octopus,* but such concerns could as easily take the form of nature and the "natural" market. One of Norris and Dreiser's most important contributions to economic discourse is their drawing attention to the terrifying inhumanity of Darwinian nature, and its indifference to the individual. Even as they represent the free market as natural, they suggest that nature is not always nurturing—that a commitment to a "natural" marketplace might clash with a commitment to the value of the individual.

Notes

1. Smith discusses the potential of monopolies to disrupt the proper functioning of the market when he discusses the natural price of commodities (52–59; bk. 1, ch. 7). He discusses the proper role of government in maintaining education, infrastructure, and a standing army throughout book five.

2. In *The Taming of Chance,* Ian Hacking argues that "during the nineteenth century it became possible to see that the world might be regular and yet not

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subject to universal laws of nature. A space was cleared for chance" (1). While Hacking admits that the entrance of chance into intellectual discourse revises Enlightenment ideology, he concentrates on the way that the potential disruptive power of chance is neutralized, noting, "The erosion of determinism is not the creation of disorder and ignorance—quite the contrary. . . .By the end of the century chance had attained the respectability of a Victorian valet, ready to be the loyal servant of the natural, biological and social sciences" (2). The primary means of separating chance from disorder was statistics, and this is certainly how Darwin separates the two. As Hacking observes, "evolutionary theorizing was to import chance into biology" (8). Whereas Hacking concentrates on the ways in which statistics tame chance, my thesis is that certain naturalist works resist the taming of chance by insisting on tracing out the fate of individuals rather than statistical aggregates.

3. Joseph McElrath, for instance, takes the first position (98–100). Steven Frye argues along similar lines to Pizer that the ending is odd because "there is no event in the novel that manifests this triumph of good [that Presley sees]" other than the "contrived" death of one of the railroad's most despicable henchmen, Behrman, and the "inadequately rendered" idea that the wheat will feed the hungry (219). Adam Wood takes the final position, claiming that *The Octopus* is "riddled with ideological contradictions" and "unconsciously reveals the process of myth construction in the reification of the market of wheat as a natural phenomenon" (108). My own view is closest to Wood's, though I do not believe that the novel's contradiction is inherent to Norris's treatment of the wheat market as natural. Rather, what the novel's internal contradiction reveals is the extent to which Darwinian nature is unfriendly to the concept of individual liberty.

4. The contrast between the business plot and the marriage plot in *The Pit* has caused problems for a number of critics, much as has the contrast between the ending of *The Octopus* and the rest of the novel. Pizer largely dismisses *The Pit*, noting, "Neither the business nor the love plot of *The Pit* is really successful, yet they are more successful independently than together" (*Frank Norris* 174). McElrath treats the two sides of the novel more or less separately, reading the love plot as a critique of Romanticism and the business plot as a critique of the market, though he does note that some themes remain parallel between the two plots—for instance, both involve a character who feels a great deal of hubris (107–21). Other critics have tended to take McElrath's route, exploring the thematic similarities of the two plots while reading the plots as parallel rather than intersecting. See, for instance, David Zimmerman's "Frank Norris, Market Panic, and the Mesmeric Sublime," which reads the theme of mesmerism in both plots. Other critics have concentrated almost solely on one of the

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plots or the other, and Clare Virginia Eby notes the "longstanding critical misjudgment" (149) of *The Pit* that has led critics to concentrate on the business plot in eschewal of the love plot. Karsten H. Piep provides an overview of the failure of scholarship since the late 1940s to reconcile the two plots (28–31). Piep's is also one of the few attempts to tie the two plots together on more than thematic lines, portraying the relationship between the call for companionate marriage and Progressive ideas about the importance of cooperation in industrial capitalism and arguing that the novel pursues a Progressive political stance that joins these two agendas together. Alternatively, Howard Horwitz claims that the novel's aesthetic problems stem from the fact that the two plots are too parallel, resulting in the romanticizing of the business plot (215–16).

5. I use the text of the 1927 edition of *The Financier,* the only edition still in print. Dreiser first published a substantially longer edition in 1912, which he felt to be poorly edited and rushed on account of financial pressures he was feeling at the time. When his pecuniary situation improved he re-edited the novel resulting in a second edition. For more on the differences between the two editions, see Kevin Jett.

6. F. O. Matthiessen, for instance, writes that Cowperwood is "Dreiser's version of 'the survival of the fittest,' intermingled with traits of Nietzsche's 'Superman,' and possessing also what Dreiser calls a 'Machiavellian' brain" (131–32). Pizer concentrates primarily on Nietzsche's influence on Dreiser, but does note that Nietzsche likely appealed to Dreiser in part because his "will to power" resembled "Spencerian Social Darwinism," which Dreiser had already accepted (*Theodore Dreiser* 158).

7. David A. Zimmerman provides an analysis of the role of chance similar to Michaels's. Suggesting that "*The Financier* documents the operation of nature and its laws as they reveal themselves in the title character's fight with other men and his attempt to impose stability upon an unpredictable universe" ("*The Financier*" 4), Zimmerman argues that Cowperwood's attempts to impose stability ultimately fail: "Panic puts an end to Cowperwood's prospects because, for Dreiser, the universe, governed by inscrutable and impersonal forces, subject to chance and flux, must frustrate any attempt to bring the future into line, to plot it, to see it prospectively. . . .Nature defies any attempt to contain it within a single vision or hold it hostage to a single design" (9). Unlike Michaels, however, Zimmerman does not directly suggest that chance disrupts the functioning of evolution.

8. Lois Hughson similarly notes that the struggle between the squid and the lobster occurs under artificial conditions (53).

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The Drama of Gender and Genre in Edith Wharton's Realism

Regina Martin

Edith Wharton's depiction of the socially ambitious Undine Spragg's peregrinations through New York and French "society" suggests that *The Custom of the Country,* like so many of Wharton's novels, is concerned with the boundaries separating social groups. I surround "society" with quotation marks because much of the novel's plot turns on Undine's bewilderment at the disconcerting fluidity of the word's referent. Undine knows that she wants to be in "society," but identifying exactly what "society" is and who is in it proves to be less straightforward than she had anticipated. From the isolating distance of her mid-western parlor, New York "society" seemed simply to consist of those people and places discussed in the society papers. But when she arrives in New York, she discovers "unsuspected social gradations" (19) that complicate her understanding of the term. In the opening scenes of the novel, she learns from Mrs. Heeney that Ralph Marvel, with his slight build, subtle manners, and inconspicuous behavior is more "in" than society painter Claud Walsingham Popple, whose "masterly manner" and "domineering, yet caressing address" make him "seem so much more in the key of the world she read about in the Sunday papers" (16). In a European context, the term becomes even more complicated as Ralph reveals to her on their honeymoon that: "Society, to everybody here, means the sanction of their own special groups and of the corresponding groups elsewhere" (101).

While Undine tries to locate, define, and become a member of *the* "society" that will satisfy her social ambitions, her author is concerned with an equally vague term crucial to her *literary* ambitions: namely, "realism." As fluid as Undine's "society," "realism's" referent has bewildered writers and scholars who have tried to locate a set of conventions that

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might stabilize the term. Wharton is one of these writers. In *The Writing of Fiction*, a polemic for realism, she informs us that writers of realism represent only "crucial moments," setting them apart "from the welter of existence" (14). Explaining how one identifies those "crucial moments," she can only insist that "there must be something that *makes* them crucial"—that "something" being a "recognizable relation to a familiar social or moral standard." Such a formula begs a number of questions about those "familiar social or moral standards," but Wharton leaves her definition at that, recording her frustration in the italics that *make* her point and put an end to a potentially endless interrogation. Of course more recent scholars are less concerned with defining realism than in explaining how and why a piece or corpus of literature comes to bear the label of realism.[1] While Wharton's criticism may appear naïve in this contemporary climate, her novel, as I will show, does not. Running parallel to Wharton's interest in social groups in *The Custom of the Country* is an interest in literary genres that reflects a much more complex understanding of realism, one that sheds light on what critics have come to recognize as the label's gendered history.

Although Wharton was unable to satisfactorily define realism, she deliberately established herself as a writer of it. As a woman, she ran the risk of being categorized as a writer of popular, sentimental fiction—that is, a member of the "d_____d mob of scribbling women" that Nathaniel Hawthorne so violently resented (qtd. in Myerson xiv). During Wharton's lifetime, sentimental fiction, which had dominated the nineteenth-century American literary marketplace, came under fierce attack from multiple fronts, including the realist, modernist, and naturalist movements. Sentimentalism became, in Suzanne Clark's words, the "unwarranted discourse" (1), as practitioners of these other literary modes set out to distance themselves from the sentimental tradition and establish their authority as the creators of legitimate literature.[2] Just as Undine strategically marries, divorces, and remarries in an effort to position herself in the most prestigious social group, then, Wharton meticulously constructs in her letters and fiction a literary persona that Hildegard Hoeller aptly describes as "Wharton the realist" (x). Thus, Wharton's association with realism, like Undine's various marriages, enacts a striving for social prestige, and Wharton's concern with literary genres in *Custom* reflects this attempt. Critics often read *Custom* as an ethnography of social groups, but it can also be read as a taxonomy of literary genres, and, as I will argue, within

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the novel's taxonomy, realism does not denote a stable set of conventions; instead, "realism" is similar to Undine's "society," a term that is continually reconstituted as a source of authority and prestige according to a complex network of inclusions and exclusions as it encounters other literary genres.[3]

Romantic encounters: Lily Estradina, a great princess in disguise

The scene that suggested to me reading the novel as a taxonomy of literary genres is yet another moment in the novel that muddles Undine's notion of "society." Following her divorce from Ralph, confident that she has uncovered all of the "unsuspected social gradations" and decoded the complex network of "societies" in Paris, Undine encounters Princess Estradina, a member of the Faubourg Saint Germain, who mentions her "intimacy" (237) with Madame Adelschein as a "pretext" for introducing herself to Undine. Understandably, this "overthrew all Undine's hierarchies." Undine had recently sworn off her association with Madame Adelschein's group because it had prevented her from regaining her position in the American "set" after her divorce. That her attachment to Adelschein should now be the catalyst for her entrance into an even more exclusive group is, for Undine, a welcome irony. However, I am less concerned with this irony than with the generic implications of Wharton's curious depiction of the Princess Estradina. While the Princess might appear merely as a clever plot device for renewing the relationship between Undine and Raymond, her role is crucial to understanding how Wharton's interest in social groups informs and is informed by her interest in the relationship among literary genres.

In writing Princess Estradina, Wharton draws on conventions typical of seventeenth-century romance novels, the genre seen by several literary scholars as the precursor to the European realist novel.[4] One of the notable features of a seventeenth-century romance heroine is that a singular ethic governs her existence. As the narrator of Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote,* a famous eighteenth century parody of romance novels, explains, for romance heroines "Love [is] the ruling Principle of the World . . . every other Passion [is] subordinate to this; and . . . it cause[s] all the Happiness and Miseries of Life" (7).[5] Similarly, the Princess is motivated solely

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by romantic love: she readily violates conventions held dear by members of the French aristocracy when she associates with Madame Adelschein's group, whose members are notorious for their sexual promiscuity; she engages Undine's help in concealing an affair with "a person without whom, for the moment, she found life intolerable" (245); she prefers one of her daughters to the other because of "the interesting accident of its parentage" (239); and she is stupefied by Undine and her fellow Americans' tendency to "behave as if love were a secret infirmity" (238). She also resembles romantic heroines in her appearance. Such heroines are often disguised as men or members of the lower classes and later revealed to be, in the words of Lennox's heroine, Arabella, "great Princess[es] in Disguise" (216). Comically, when the Princess first approaches her, Undine almost dismisses her off-hand because her actual social position is concealed by apparel and a demeanor that suggest a lack of cultivation. She has "the gait of a baker's boy balancing his basket," and she wears "baggy shabby clothes like a man's, or rich draperies that look as if they had been rained on" (238). Because of their mutual association with Madame Adelschein, the Princess expects Undine to be a kindred spirit, and she attempts to foster an intimacy with her. It is typical for romance heroines to come together and share the "history" of their romantic encounters, and just as each time Arabella encounters a potential female companion she entreats the woman to "favour her with the Recital of her Adventures" (327), Princess Estradina "did not scruple to talk [to Undine] of her sentimental experiences" (238).

Estradina's frank confessions do not have their intended effect, however. They evoke blushes from Undine, who, the narrator explains, "had so few to relate in turn." In making this claim, the narrator seemingly engages in an act of duplicity normally reserved for Undine. The reader is well aware of her recent "adventures" with Peter Van Degen, not to mention the multiple engagements prior to her marriage. But in a sense, the narrator's claim is perfectly genuine, as Undine's affair with Van Degen was more of a business venture (the narrator compares it to one of her father's business deals) than an "adventure" motivated by an irresistible passion.[6] Undine's lack of stories is thus less a problem of too few experiences than a problem of interpretation, or rather "understanding." Indeed, throughout the novel, Undine is repeatedly accused of failing to "understand." In comparison to Clare Van Degen's "great gift of momentary understanding," Undine is, in Ralph's words, "a blank wall

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of incomprehension" (198). And in response to her suggestion that they sell the de Chelles tapestries, Raymond sighs, "Ah, you don't understand" (322). Undine's failure to "understand" Ralph, Raymond, and the Princess can be accounted for by the common reading of the novel as an ethnography of social groups: Undine does not share the traditions and values that provide a common foundation for meaning and bind the respective groups' members together. However, reading Undine's encounter with the Princess as an encounter with romance fiction suggests Undine lacks stories not because she lacks experience but because she fails to read them according to romantic conventions. Likewise, Undine fails to understand Ralph and Raymond because she does not share the values that underwrite sentimental fiction, the literary genre with which they and their social groups are associated.

Aborigines and invaders: sentimentalism and realism

Examining the rhetoric surrounding realism and sentimentalism dur- Wharton's lifetime, Hildegard Hoeller identifies a number of binary oppositions used to differentiate the two genres (1–37). That rhetoric, for example, relies on a classic opposition between the material and spiritual. Realism, it is said, privileges external, material reality, while sentimental fiction is said to privilege spiritual or internal experience. In *The Writing of Fiction,* Wharton reproduces this binary, praising Balzac and Stendhal's realism for its representation of "each character . . . as a product of particular material and social conditions, as being thus or thus because of the calling he pursued or the house he lived in . . . or the society he wanted to get into . . . or the acre of ground he coveted, or the powerful or fashionable personage he aped or envied" (6–7). If in realism characters are said to be produced by their physical environs, in sentimentalism they must then be produced by their feelings, leading to a devaluation of the body. In *Sensational Designs,* for example, Jane Tompkins offers multiple instances of sentimental heroines suffering from terminal illnesses who are content to physically expire as long as their soul remains pure (154). Sentimentalism's focus on the so-called internal character reflects a binary logic by which internal character determines external experience so that sentimentalism imagines a direct correspondence between internal thoughts and a character's external actions. Such logic, however dubious, helps to explain why tears and other physical reactions like blushing and

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fainting play such an important role in sentimental fiction—as purportedly spontaneous, physical manifestations of characters' internal feelings.[7] If the sentimental subject is believed to be constructed through internal thought, its domain is the private sphere, while the realist subject, defined by its material reality, must be a public one. And indeed, sentimentalism has been traditionally linked to the "private sphere" and its concomitant domestic ideology. As Amy Kaplan explains, "popular women novelists of the mid-nineteenth century viewed their writing as an extension of woman's work at home" and they "tried to absorb their writing into their domestic roles" (70). Thus, fiction that has been categorized as sentimental is said to privilege the domestic sphere and conventionally feminine themes such as love and motherhood.

Interpreting *Custom* in light of this binary structure suggests a provocative reading of the various social groups in the novel: the aboriginal groups, the Dagonets and de Chelles, are aligned with many of the characteristics conventionally associated with sentimental fiction while the invading groups, the Van Degens and the Spraggs, are associated with those that purportedly constitute realism. This opposition is evident, for example, in the architecture of the groups' respective houses:

> Ralph Marvell, mounting his grandfather's doorstep, looked up at the symmetrical old red house-front, with its frugal marble ornament, as he might have looked into a familiar human face. . . .His mother and old Mr. Urban Dagonet, both, from Ralph's earliest memories, [were] so closely identified with the old house in Washington Square that they might have passed for its inner consciousness as it might have stood for their outward form; and the question as to which the house now seemed to affirm their intrinsic rightness was that of the social disintegration expressed by widely different architectural physiognomies at the other end of Fifth Avenue . . . [Ralph] said to himself that what Popple called society was really just like the houses it lived in: a muddle of misapplied ornament over a thin steel shell of utility. The steel shell was built up in Wall Street, the social trimmings were hastily added in Fifth Avenue; and the union between them was as monstrous as fractious, as unlike the gradual homogeneous growth which flowers into what other countries know as society. (46)

Whereas the Dagonet house expresses Ralph's "inner consciousness" and links Ralph's and his family's identity to a domestic space that, in its sym-

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metry and frugality, is an external manifestation of the family's character, the Fifth Avenue houses are mere façade, "a thin steel shell of utility" and "social trimmings," with only "skeleton walls." The Fifth Avenue houses do not seem to contain any interior at all, much less one conducive to a domestic existence, and for good reason. The members of the nouveau riche have no need of domestic space. Raymond de Chelle, Ralph's French counterpart, refers to the American nouveau riche as nomads "who [have] no homes, who [are] born and [die] in hotels" (314).[8]

The novel thus associates the nouveau riche with mere surface appearances. Waiting for Raymond at the Nouveau Luxe, a popular destination for American travelers whose garden, "opened green depths that skillfully hid its narrow boundaries" (173), Charles Bowen describes the party as a "seemingly solid scene" resting on "layers and layers of unsubstantialness" (168). The American "set" is "a phantom 'society,' with all the rules, smirks, gestures of its model, but evoked out of promiscuity and incoherence while the other had been the product of continuity and choice" (169). And Raymond says of the American women, "One is sometimes inclined to deny your compatriots actual beauty—to charge them with producing the effect without having the features" (172). In these passages, surface appearances are repeatedly said to misrepresent reality. The garden is "skillfully" designed to make the Nouveau Luxe appear larger than it is. The scene appears to be "solid" because the Americans enact the "gestures" that signify social prestige, but they lack the tradition that would give those gestures "substance," and the women don the accoutrements of beauty without actually being beautiful. Crucially, however, the ethic that condemns the American nouveau riche as hollow and insubstantial relies on a sentimental logic that demands appearance should flow from and thereby indicate a prior ontology.

If I am correct in locating an association between genres and social groups in *Custom,* and if the Fifth Avenue set does align with realism, these passages carry serious implications for that genre. They suggest that realism is a mere "shell," constantly in transition and, perhaps most intriguingly, parasitic in its appropriation of "rules, smirks, and gestures" of other genres to buttress its own legitimacy. This is quite an indictment of realism, coming as it does from an author who so forcefully claimed it as her own mode of novelistic production. Nevertheless, as I will argue, such is the model of realism that the novel supports.

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Realism reading sentimentalism: Undine's appropriation of sentimental conventions

Although Ralph and Raymond repeatedly accuse Undine of not "understanding," it is they who fail to "understand" Undine, and the novel attributes their failure to their reliance on sentimental conventions. In other words, they mistakenly read Undine as a sentimental heroine. On their honeymoon in Italy, Ralph picks up Undine's "featherweight, puff-ball of a hand" and while

> scrutinizing it . . . the upper world had vanished: his universe had shrunk to the palm of a hand. But there was no sense of diminution. In the mystic depths whence his passion sprang, earthly dimensions were ignored and the curve of beauty was boundless enough to hold whatever the imagination could pour into it. Ralph had never felt more convinced of his power to write a great poem; but now it was Undine's hand which held the magic wand of expression. (88)

Later, after his encounter with Undine following the disappointment of Paul's birthday party, Ralph reflects back on this moment in Italy: "He knew now that he should never hereafter look at his wife's hand without remembering something he had read in it that day. Its surface-language had been sweet enough, but under the rosy lines he had seen the warning letters" (137). Just as in sentimental fiction the body serves as mere vessel for the passions contained within, in the honeymoon passage Undine's hand represents for Ralph the "mystic depths whence his passion sprang." He locates continuity between the beauty of the hand's surface and the passion that must necessarily reside within. In the latter passage, he realizes that he had "read" the hand incorrectly. Its apparent "sweetness" does not represent any actual "sweetness" in Undine's character. Indeed, what lies beneath the surface of that hand is remarkably unfeeling: "so malleable outwardly, she had remained insensible to the touch of the heart" (139).

Though in this scene Ralph is just becoming aware of the chasm between Undine's surface and depth, the reader's gaze has already been directed toward it. Preceding her climactic encounter with Ralph, Undine rides in a car with Peter Van Degen on an inappropriately circuitous way home from Popple's tea. She expresses concern about the expense of the fancy dress she had purchased for the now-defunct Driscoll ball by letting out a "sigh." When Van Degen asks her what the matter is, "she

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began murmuring that it was nothing" but "she did so with the conscious purpose of being persuaded to confess" (125). The novel is replete with examples of Undine's deliberate deceptions, and a close look at these will reveal her to be a far better reader of sentimental literature than Ralph. As part of her business strategy—for all of her conquests are "carefully calculated as the happiest Wall Street 'stroke'" (244)—Undine consciously appropriates sentimental conventions, using them to manipulate the objects of her desire. During the engagement dinner at the Dagonets', Undine,

> had not been ten minutes at table before she found that to seem very much in love, and a little confused and subdued by the newness and intensity of the sentiment, was, to the Dagonet mind, the becoming attitude for a young lady in her situation. The part was not hard to play, for she *was* in love, of course. It was pleasant, when she looked across the table, to meet Ralph's gray eyes, with that new look in them, and to feel that she had kindled it. (58)

In this passage Undine plays the part of a sentimental heroine, knowing that doing so will more completely secure her "victory" in the "war" she has waged against the Dagonets' reservations concerning her marriage. The victory over her second sentimental hero, Raymond, is similarly brought about via an appeal to sentimental conventions. Toward the end of their playful flirtation, just when Undine fears she is losing her hold on Raymond, she receives a letter from her mother about Paul, which brought tears to her eyes, and just as the tears "overflowed and ran down . . . the door was thrown open to admit Raymond de Chelles" and "certain it is that on that day" the narrator explains, "her suitor first alluded to a possibility . . . and there fell upon Undine's attentive ears the magic phrase 'annulment of marriage'" (249–50).

Genre and gender, part 1: sentimentalizing masculinity

Thus far I have suggested that realism and sentimentalism correspond to the two social groups in *Custom*, the "invaders" and the "aborigines" respectively. However, beyond the passages containing Ralph's reflections on the divergent architectural styles associated with each group, I have focused exclusively on Undine's relationships with Ralph and Raymond. I

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have done so for good reason. Though the categories do align with social groups at the beginning of the novel, over the course of the novel, one by one, all of the male characters come to be associated with sentimentalism. The most striking example of this is Elmer Moffatt, who, at first glance, seems to embody realism as much as Ralph does sentimentalism. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, sentimentalism had come under attack in part because it was said to rely on a highly conventionalized plot structure and like such a structure, Ralph's life was pre-written for him by the long line of Dagonet men that had preceded him: "Harvard first—then Oxford; then a year of wandering and rich initiation. Returning to New York, he had read law, and now had his desk in the office of the respectable firm in whose charge the Dagonet estate had moldered for several generations" (47). By contrast, Moffatt "seemed to promise the capacity to develop into any character he might care to assume" (68). Moffatt is not one of the "conventionalized puppets" that Wharton attributes to the sentimental novel in *The Writing of Fiction* (4).

The impulse might be, then, to align Moffatt with realism. However, Moffatt differs from Undine and is similar to Ralph and Raymond in two important ways. The first concern is his attachment to objects. Where Undine is the temporary stopping point for an endless flow of commodities—dresses, hats, jewelry, and so on—Ralph, who surrounds himself with "the relics of his youth" (135), has a sentimental attachment to the objects in his life. Likewise, Raymond is flabbergasted by Undine's failure to "understand" the sentimental value of the family tapestries when she attempts to attach a monetary value to them. Significantly, Moffatt also shares Ralph's and Raymond's attachment to objects. Though his attachment to them is not the result of a historical relationship, he does see an intrinsic value in things, a sentiment that Undine never shares. When Ralph is speaking with Moffatt in his office about an investment opportunity, Moffatt picks up a pink crystal and says, "now and then I like to pick up a pretty thing" and "Ralph noticed that his eyes caressed it" (276). Earlier, in Undine's apartment, Moffatt "stopped before a table covered with showy trifles, and after looking at them for a moment singled out a dim old brown and golden book which de Chelles had given her. He examined it lingeringly, as though it touched the spring of some choked-up sensibility for which he had no language" (255). And, of course, Moffatt ultimately becomes a collector of "things that are not for sale" (325), including the paintings and de Chelle tapestries that he takes a moment to admire in the final scene (362). In one sense, Moffatt's appreciation for objects is rooted in his desire to acquire the accoutrements of social

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prestige, a desire similar to Undine's. Nevertheless, he has an attachment to and sees value in the objects that Undine will never understand. It seems unlikely that he will haphazardly discard the aristocratic relics once he tires of their effects.

Moffatt is also similar to Ralph and Raymond in his relationship to Paul. Undine is most obviously distanced from the sentimental tradition in her utter lack of motherly sensibilities, and it need not be said that she has no emotional attachment to her son. Each of her husbands, however, forms a close bond with the boy. The next-to-last scene in the novel has Moffatt on his knees comforting Paul, who is crying because he misses his "French father" and is hurt by his mother's "absentmindedness" (360-61), by hugging him and saying, "If we two chaps stick together it won't be so bad—we can keep each other warm" (361). The novel thus ends on a stark contrast between Undine's self-absorbed, never-ending search for *the* "society" and two male figures finding solace and strength in their mutual sympathy. But this is not the first time the novel draws such a contrast. Peter Van Degen ultimately refuses to marry Undine because he experiences a similar moment of sympathy for a male figure. He discovers that in running off with him, Undine ignored a summons to care for her sick husband, and "One day when he wasn't feeling very well [Van Degen] thought to himself: 'Would she act like that to *me* if I was dying?' And after that he never felt the same toward Undine" (221). After establishing a parallel between social groups and literary genres, then, the novel reworks that parallel in terms of genre and gender. In contrast to novels that demonstrate the historical abjection of feminized genres, by sentimentalizing the male figures *Custom* associates the repudiated genre with masculinity.

Genre and gender, part 2: the female figure and the authenticity of realism

As Hawthorne's censure of that "d_____d mob of scribbling women" suggests, the attack on sentimentalism was saturated with a gendered rhetoric that aligned realism, naturalism, and modernism with masculinity and sentimentalism with femininity, drawing upon the conventional gender hierarchy to buttress its ethos. That the realist, naturalist, and modernist movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries cast themselves, in Hoeller's words, as masculine "corrective[s] to a feminine

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tradition" (19) is well documented in recent scholarship.[9] As with any symbolic category, lacking a self-constituting feature setting itself apart as a distinct ontology, the fluid boundaries of realism have a long history of being shored up via classic abjections of devalued others, and frequently the other has come to be devalued through a process of feminization.

The nineteenth-century American realist "corrective to a feminine tradition" is of course not the first or last instance in Anglo-literary history in which gender has been mobilized to discredit one literary genre and usher in the hegemony of another. The English realist novel has its origins in a similar dynamic. In his now classic history of the English novel, Michael McKeon argues that the English novel benefited from and helped create the conditions for a shift in the notion of truth in eighteenth-century England. Where truth had been a function of historical representation, in the eighteenth century it came to be linked to a mode of representation grounded in verisimilitude. The realist novel's precursor, romance fiction, which was popular in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, had based its legitimacy on a claim to historical accuracy. Romance novels typically began with a "discovered manuscript," whose purpose was to frame the events described in the novels as purportedly historical ones. Suggesting that they were not the product of an author's imagination but of an historical record, such romances effaced their own fictional nature.[10] However, romance novels also frequently depicted supernatural events, violating the ideal of verisimilitude adopted by practitioners of the eighteenth-century realist novel. As the preface to Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* indicates, novelists explicitly distanced themselves from this by then discredited aspect of romance fiction. *Pamela*, the novel's editor insists, "borrows none of its Excellencies from the romantic Flights of unnatural Fancy, it being founded in Truth and Nature" (5-6). Novels like *Pamela* thus sought legitimacy by ostensibly purging themselves of the supernatural qualities of romance fiction while rhetorically asserting their difference from that genre. However, embedded in the eighteenth-century realist novel's abjection of romance fiction was an antipathy to its perceived feminization and to the threat it posed to the ideal notions of femininity that were just emerging in the eighteenth century with help from the realist novel, and would remain dominant until Wharton's lifetime.[11]

In *The Female Quixote*, Charlotte Lennox exposes the gender politics bound up in the realist novel's abjection of romance fiction. Her novel

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celebrates what it depicts as the gynocentrism of romance fiction—as Deborah Ross explains, romances offer "a sort of feminist revision of history in which women are behind every great event—not only as love objects, but as leaders of armies" (104)—and slyly mocks the contemporary censure of the genre as posing a danger to femininity. It is Arabella and her mother, but pointedly not her father, who are drawn to and absorbed by the world of romance novels, and in the romantic world, as Lennox imagines it, Arabella has an extraordinary amount of power to determine her own destiny. Her father has made her independently wealthy, so she can demand that her romantic supplicants abide by her will. At the end, Lennox yields to the expectations of her readers and depicts Arabella's reform, but in reforming, Arabella does not fully renounce her romantic inclinations—her reform is couched in the same romantic rhetoric and conventions she is supposed to be disavowing—but simply renounces the power that had accompanied those conventions. Thus, Lennox's novel argues that the realist novel's censure of romance is not a censure of romantic conventions so much as a censure of its gynocentrism.[12] In other words, Lennox's novel exposes how realist novels like *Pamela* appropriate romantic conventions but turn them to androcentric ends.[13] In laying claim to verisimilitude, then, the realist novel not only rejected the supernatural qualities of romance fiction; it also effectively categorized the romantic definition of a power-wielding and globe-trotting femininity as unrealistic.

Nancy Armstrong's famous history of the novel offers an alternative narrative to the one in which the eighteenth-century realist novel is cast as a masculine corrective to a feminized other. She argues that the eighteenth-century novel was the site of an ideological class struggle mediated by a female figure and rendered benign by its inscription within a discourse of sexual relations. In Armstrong's reading, the depoliticized and domestically oriented female figure of the British realist novel proved a clandestine source of influence for modern women. It authorized a kind of feminine discourse and eventually worked to legitimize women's writing and hence their participation in the public sphere. However, failing to consider the relationship between romance and the realist novel, Armstrong overlooks the highly contradictory maneuver in the constitution of the English novel exposed Lennox's novel. As the realist novel renders femininity abject, it relies on the female figure and the romantic conventions with which it is associated to mediate its message.

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In *Impressionist Subjects,* Tamar Katz observes a parallel phenomenon in the modernist abjection of domestic and sentimental fiction during Wharton's lifetime. Building on Andreas Huyssen's notion that a "great divide" opened as modernism emerged as a rejection of a rhetorically feminized mass culture, Katz argues that femininity is nevertheless central to modernism's project. Opposing itself to a perceived feminization of literature and mass culture, modernism nonetheless draws upon contemporary constructions of feminine subjectivity—specifically the New Woman—as a model for its own literary practice. In Katz's account, the New Woman embodies the contradictory impulses of a modernist literary practice that imagines itself, and its model of subjectivity, as wholly cut off from the idiosyncrasies of its historical moment even as it remains completely immersed in it. The impressionist subject Katz excavates in her study wants to deny its positionality within the commercialized world of time and space, but the impression itself, which is germane to such a model of subjectivity, is necessarily the product of a particular time in space. Similarly, the increasingly mobile New Woman was "immersed" in the commercial public sphere, but she also retained her links to domesticity and interiority that were presumed to shield her from the logic of exchange. In Katz's words, "The New Woman . . . offers a precursor and a model for modernism's claim to absorb and stand apart from a commodified world" (12).

I began my reading of *Custom* by arguing that Wharton enrobes the Princess Estradina in the accoutrements of a romance heroine, but this is only one way in which, as Janet Aikins Yount has argued, *Custom* "explicitly invites readers to explore parallels between the cultural unease at the turn of the twentieth century and during the mid eighteenth century" (41). Yount observes that not only does Ralph, at one point, allude to Richardson's *Clarissa,* but the novel also reproduces aspects of *Clarissa*'s plot. She is interested in how *Custom*'s rewriting of the *Clarissa* plot reenacts that novel's "generational clash" (42) between competing definitions of femininity for an early-twentieth century audience consumed by the same problem. However, the "clash" that occurs in *Custom,* as I have argued, occurs not so much along generational lines as along the lines of genre. If the eighteenth and early twentieth centuries find common ground as periods characterized by the drama of changing definitions of gender, that drama finds its corollary on the literary stage where debates about genre are cast in the language of gender. That *Custom* translates

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what at first glance appears to be a dynamic between social groups and genre to one of gender and genre indicates the novel's sensitivity to the historical affiliation between these two categories.

However, Wharton's novel reverses the historical paradigm by associating the abject genre of her historical moment with masculinity and endowing it with a valued status as object of nostalgia (even if it is a resigned nostalgia) and source of moral authority for declining old New York society. In the meantime, through its association with Undine, feminized realism is ostensibly castigated as the vacuous other that threatens the integrity of what is depicted as a full, autonomous, and self-defined category of meaning: here, sentimentalism. But as Nancy Bentley points out, *Custom* does not simply register disgust when it comes to Undine's character. It also "elicits a fascinated identification with her mimetic energy" (175-76)—that is, with her ability to imitate social behaviors and mold her personality to provoke desire. Bentley goes on to argue that Undine's "mimetic energy" works to "desublimate the odd theatricality inherent in all . . . realism" (179); if the "realist imperative" is "to see through posturing and performance to the real," the novel's fascination with Undine "is prompted by her ability to make a new reality out of a performance" (188). Normally charged with the task of resolving uncertainties through a direct and transparent accounting of reality, in Wharton's novel realism, like Undine, comes off as a capricious mistress indeed. The novel's fascination with her performativity gestures toward a fluid reality at odds with the realism—the autonomous plane of existence and meaning—that Wharton embraces in her critical work. The plenitude of meaning imagined by such a model of realism can only be realized in *Custom* as a function of sentimental conventions that the masculine characters all come to value.

This is seemingly the lesson another of Wharton's sentimental heroes learns the hard way.[14] Newland Archer, Ralph Marvell's counterpart in *The Age of Innocence,* is drawn to Ellen Olenska, the scandal-ridden cousin of his wife May, because she represents an alternative to the "hieroglyphic world" of old New York society, "where the real thing was never said or done or even thought, but only represented by a set of arbitrary signs" (40). He is initially amused by the way Ellen "doesn't care a hang" about "any of our little social sign-posts" (109) and grows to marvel at the way she flouts convention: at a dinner given in her honor she "walk[s] away from one gentleman to seek the company of another" (56). And he is made "glad" by her "rebellious spirit" when she describes the van der

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Luydens' home as "gloomy"; others privileged enough to enter the home of the preeminent old New York family would "shiver" and disingenuously call it "handsome" (65). Later in the novel, after he has revealed his feelings to Ellen, Newland passionately declares, "you look at things as they are" (255).

Newland, then, constructs an opposition between the conventionalized artificiality of his old New York set and the "wing-tip of Reality" (77) Ellen represents. Where May is an "artificial product . . . manufactured by a conspiracy of mothers and aunts and grandmothers and long-dead ancestresses" (41), and old New Yorkers are like "dolls cut out of the same folded paper" and "patterns stenciled on a wall" (74), Ellen represents "real life" (233). However, the novel carefully draws attention to how this "real life" is never more than a fantasy for Newland. After his marriage, Newland

> built up within himself a kind of sanctuary in which [Ellen] throned among his secret thoughts and longings. Little by little it became the scene of his real life. Of his only rational activities; thither he brought the books he read, the ideas and feelings which nourished him, his judgments and his visions. Outside it, in the scene of his actual life, he moved with a growing sense of unreality and unsufficency, blundering against familiar prejudices and traditional points of view as an absent-minded man goes on bumping into the furniture of his own room. (233)

If realism as a mode of representation presupposes an autonomous plane of meaning and existence, in *The Age of Innocence* that reality, represented in Newland's imagination, exists only on the plane of fantasy. Indeed, this passage from *The Age of Innocence* seemingly satirizes the passage in *The Writing of Fiction* quoted above in which Wharton praises the realism of Balzac and Stendhal's characters as products of their material environments: their professions, their societies, their houses, right down to "the acre of ground" they covet. In comparing the conventions of old New York to the materiality of a room full of furniture, Wharton thus unexpectedly conflates such conventions—condemned by Newland as artificial and by his author as ingredients for the literary puppetry of sentimentalism—with the materiality from which an authentically realist representation is supposed to derive. But this passage is not the only example of such a conflation in the novel. When Newland pleads with Ellen to escape

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with him to "a world" where "categories" do not exist and where they "shall be simply two human beings who love each other," she refuses, insisting they must "look, not at visions, but at realities" (256-57). Ellen, thus, turns Newland's understanding of reality on its head, suggesting that conventions are reality. Without them remains only "disillusionment and misery" (214).

To translate this into the logic of genre would be to construct a tautology. This was, of course, Charlotte Lennox's point in *The Female Quixote*. The English realist novel did not so much reject the conventions of romance and replace them with a genre governed by "reality" as redirect them to a new end. What interests me instead about Ellen's insight is that, as in *Custom*, it comes from a female figure, though it is treated very differently than in *Custom*. Unlike Undine, Ellen does not turn the insight to her own advantage. Although she is eventually exiled from a world that deems her a threat to proper gender relations, she plays the properly feminine role, like Arabella, by sacrificing her own desires to preserve the "reality" of that world. In contrast, like the English realist novel, Undine redeploys the conventions of the various societies she enters to turn them to her advantage. Understanding her in this way illuminates what Lennox, Armstrong, and Katz see as the paradoxical role femininity has played in generic battles throughout literary history.

Even though she is the despised figure in the novel, like the female figure was in the eighteenth-century realist novel and later the modernist novel Undine is a vehicle of hegemonic regime change. Manipulating the conventions she is said not to understand, she helps to inaugurate a new form of "truth" encapsulated in Moffatt's often cited quip: "[Raymond's] ancestors are *his* business: Wall Street is mine" (351). When Undine marries Moffatt, the ethic of "Wall Street" displaces the values of old New York and becomes what Wharton calls in *The Writing of Fiction*, the "familiar social or moral standard" that governs the appearance of realism. On the surface, then, Undine appears to wield a great deal of social power, and her body carries with it the capacity to legitimize an entire world view. Yet the novel repeatedly undermines a reading of Undine as a powerful figure by directing the reader's attention to the clandestine source of her power. Though she appears to cunningly orchestrate her own incorporation into each new and ever more prestigious society, the true agent of each of Undine's successes is Moffatt. He makes possible her marriage to Ralph by providing Undine's father with an investment opportunity;

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he enables her divorce from Ralph by giving him the investment opportunity that funds her trip to Paris; he makes possible her annulment and subsequent marriage to Raymond by offering Ralph yet another, though bunk, investment opportunity; and her divorce from Raymond is made possible, finally, by his wealth. According to this logic, Undine's social climbing is not ultimately for her benefit, but for his. By orchestrating her various marriages he effectively associates her with social prestige so that, like the other relics of European aristocracy he accumulates, when he acquires her in marriage she then underwrites his own increased social prestige, and his Wall Street world view becomes the new basis for truth. Like Lennox's novel, *Custom* illuminates how the category of realism does not abandon the conventions of unwarranted genres but, rather, works to give them new meaning by turning them to different ends. However, realism does so only momentarily. If, as the dealmaker orchestrating Undine's marriages Moffatt seems to align with realism's materialism, like all hegemonic genres, he can claim that label only temporarily. The end of the novel suggests that Moffatt's world view will soon be as obsolete as one of Undine's dresses. Undine has already turned her eye toward another social group, and presumably she will avail herself of Moffat's extraordinary wealth to gain her end. Thus, at the end of the novel, as the Fifth Avenue architecture and the Nouveau Luxe scenes suggested, realism is always on the move, feeding on the genres it claims to repudiate.

Virginia Woolf famously described femininity as "the dark continent" (qtd. in Garrity 15), and in *A Room of One's Own,* she tackles the necessarily vexed issue of "women and fiction." What does the phrase "women and fiction" mean, Woolf asks at the outset of her investigation. It could mean, Woolf writes, "women and what they are like; or it might mean women and the fiction that they write; or it might mean women and the fiction that is written about them; or it might mean that somehow all three are inextricably mixed together" (1). But the possibility that Woolf leaves out of this list is the one with which her polemic is arguably most concerned: the phrase could mean women *are* fiction—or more precisely, they are the stuff fiction is made of. Such a thesis is the point of Woolf's story about her trip to the British Museum (29). While preparing the speech that becomes the occasion for *A Room of One's Own,* Woolf goes to the British Museum to read books about women and is frustrated to discover that "Wherever one looked men thought about women and thought differently" (32). Taking notes on the copious and contradictory

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writings about women proves impossible for Woolf, so in frustration she begins to draw a picture of one of these men writing about women. She names her anonymous man "Professor von X," and she imagines him with an "angry" expression as he writes "his monumental work entitled *The Mental, Moral, and Physical Inferiority of the Female Sex*" (33). But Woolf's sketch of the angry professor leads her to a surprising conclusion. Instead of helping her to understand the professor's anger, it causes her to recognize her own anger: "My heart had leapt. My cheeks had burnt. I had flushed with anger" (34). In this anecdote, Woolf demonstrates the relationship between women and fiction by turning on its head the process by which women become the stuff of fiction. Just as her drawing ultimately reflects her own anger, not the professor's, the professor's writing about women reflects his own desires and resentments. In this process, the feminine figure functions as an empty set, waiting to receive its defining characteristics, characteristics that authenticate masculine desire.[15]

Both *Custom of the Country* and *Age of Innocence* reproduce this logic. Newland appreciates the women in his life who reflect his own desires. We learn that prior to his engagement to May, he had had a flirtation, if not a full-blown affair, with a married woman, and he broke off the relationship when he discovered she was more enamored of the "secrecy and peril of the affair" than "such charms and qualities as he possessed" (86). Prior to his marriage, he is attracted to May because he believes her innocence will lend him the opportunity to shape her into an image of his own desires. He is disappointed to learn, however, that her innocence is not evidence of a blank slate but is itself carefully cultivated to fit what old New York believes he should want in a woman: "he felt himself oppressed by this creation of factitious purity, so cunningly manufactured . . . because it was supposed to be what he wanted" (41). Ellen, on the other hand, represents a world without categories, and Newland builds up a fantasy world around her in which they find pleasure in the things he enjoys: "the books he read, the ideas and feelings which nourished him, his judgments and his visions" (233). Even more suggestively, when Newland is charged with fetching Ellen back to Catherine Mingott's house, he descends to the pier and sees Ellen in the distance facing away. When she fails to turn around, he is disappointed that she does not sense his presence, thinking to himself, "Shouldn't I know if she came up behind me" (191), and he walks away without approaching her. At the end of the novel determines not to enter Ellen's apartment because, he thinks, his image of her is "more real"

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on the park bench than it would be if he "went up" (320). Newland may fall in love with Ellen because she represents to him something more real than May's cultivated innocence, but she stands out in the novel as the greatest of fictions: the "real life" Newland imagines her to represent is but a fictional mirror of his own desires.[16]

In *The Custom of the Country,* Wharton applies this logic to the problem of realism as a literary genre. If realism is an empty signifier that acquires meaning through the redeployment of repudiated conventions, so too is Undine Spragg. Undine is the grotesque embodiment of a history of literary realism founded upon a feminine figure whose representational vacuity and protean capacity enables realism to masquerade as the full and autonomous category of experience its name promises. Although in this novel Wharton sets her sights on realism, her heroine reads more generally as a critique of the historical and literary representations of femininity that have defined woman as a vacant category and offered her up to hegemonic literary genres as compensation for their own lack of intrinsic meaning. We may be inclined to condemn Undine for her utter lack of feeling and for her using and then tossing aside others in her pursuit of shallow ambitions, but if we condemn her, the novel insists, we must also scrutinize the literary history that has made Undine who she is. : void of feeling and meaning so she can be defined and redefined to serve ends that are not necessarily her own.

Notes

1. Recent American literary criticism is replete with such discussions. Michael Davitt Bell looks at the "purpose" using a label like realism served and continues to serve. Phillip Barrish looks at how realist texts make a claim to "realist prestige." Nancy Bentley looks at how realism appeals to scientific discourse to assert its legitimacy. And Amy Kaplan argues that realism is "a strategy for imagining and managing the threats of social change" (10).

2. In her autobiography, *A Backward Glance,* Wharton condemns "the laxities of the great Louisa" (51) and the "rose-and-lavender" (294) of regional novels. Kaplan explains that Wharton "struggled against the domestic legacy of the American female novelists to define her notion of professional authorship" and "rejected their sentimental product to define her notion of realism" (71). See also Jeanne Boydston.

3. For readings of *Custom* as an ethnography of social groups, see Nancy Bentley, Mary Ellis Gibson, and Christopher Gair. For a related discussion of how

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communication technologies establish barriers between social groups in the novel, see Aaron Worth.

4. Ian Watt and Michael McKeon both make this argument in their respective histories of the novel.

5. *The Female Quixote* is probably the second most prominent parody of romance novels, *Don Quixote,* of course being the first. I opt for *The Female Quixote,* however, because it draws attention to the feminine orientation of romance fiction that has inspired several critics in the past couple of decades to locate feminist values in the genre as well as the culture that grew up around romance fiction (a point important later in my argument). For feminist readings of romance fiction see Deborah Ross, Jane Spencer, and Helen Hackett.

6. It is common for critics to read Undine's various romantic encounters as business ventures. For examples see Elizabeth Ammons, Debra Ann MacComb, Margaret B. McDowell, Claire Preston, and Ticien Marie Sassoubre.

7. For more on the role of crying, fainting, and blushing in sentimental fiction see R. F. Brissenden and Christine Roulston.

8. The de Chelle women, like the Dagonet women, are associated with the interior of their houses: "The innumerable rooms of the Saint Desert were furnished with the embroidered hangings and tapestry chairs produced by generations of diligent chatelaines, and the untiring needles of the old Marquise, her daughters and dependents were still steadily increasing the provision" (314).

9. For realism see Hoeller and Bell, for modernism see Clark and Andreas Huyssen, and for naturalism see Francesca Sawaya. Nina Baym and Jane Tompkins argue that this dynamic has been preserved in academic literary criticism.

10. For more about the discovered manuscript trope in romance fiction see McKeon (23-56). See Catherine Gallagher for a discussion of how the idea of fiction emerged along with the eighteenth-century realist novel.

11. See Jane Spencer, Helen Hackett, Laurie Langbauer, and Deborah Ross.

12. This is a standard reading of Lennox's novel. See Scott Paul Gordon, Mary Patricia Martin, Wendy Motooka, and Patricia Meyer Spacks.

13. See McKeon and Margaret Anne Doody for examples of how *Pamela* appropriates romantic conventions.

14. Lloyd M. Daigrepont describes Newland as a romantic hero (in the tradition of romantic poetry, not romance fiction), but the qualities that Daigrepont identifies as romantic in Newland are also typically associated with sentimentalism: like romantic and sentimental heroes, Newland seeks to transcend the

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limitations of material reality through passion or feeling. Viewed in this light, romanticism is distinguishable from sentimentalism only as an authorized, masculine alternative.

15. Woolf is fascinated by this process throughout her oeuvre. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Peter Walsh follows an unnamed woman on the street and imagines that she is fantasizing about him (52–54). In *The Waves*, Bernard imagines that the unnamed, female recipient of a letter he writes constructs an elaborate fantasy about him in which he plays the part of a Byronic poet (77–79).

16. Susan Goodman agrees (98–99), and, from a Lacanian perspective, Jean Witherow comes to a similar conclusion. In a parallel vein, Kathy Miller Hadley argues that Ellen represents the "new frontier" that, as a "traditional American hero," Newland seeks. Only in a "New land," Hadley contends, can Newland construct a wholly distinct definition of self, a privilege coded as masculine in American realism (263–64).

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Robert Frost, Live: Authenticity and Performance in the Audio Archive

Raphael Allison

> But all the fun's in how you say a thing.
> —Robert Frost, "The Mountain"

The most famous poetry reading in American history occurred on Friday, January 20, 1961. On that bright and chilly morning, Robert Frost stood before a vast crowd assembled at the Capitol in Washington, D.C., to recite "The Gift Outright" as part of John F. Kennedy's inauguration ceremony. Frost had planned to say two poems that morning. The first, "Dedication" (subsequently titled "For John F. Kennedy His Inauguration"), Frost couldn't complete because the sharp sun blinded his failing eyes, despite his having had the poem typed on an oversized-character typewriter once used by President Eisenhower. After fumbling through the first few lines of "Dedication" Frost abandoned it altogether, telling the crowd, to their roaring approval, that it was merely "a preface to the poem I can say to you without seeing it" (qtd. in Thompson, *Later Years* 281). He then intoned "The Gift Outright" in a voice that Frost's biographer Lawrance Thompson calls "firm and unfaltering" and a reporter for the Washington *Post* termed "natural" (qtd. in Thompson 282), though he dramatically revised the poem's final line, "Such as she was, such as she would become." Thompson describes the scene as Frost reached the end of his poem:

> Here he paused, and in slow, accentuated tones, gave his altered version of the last line: "Such as she was, such as she *would* become, *has* become, and I—and for this occasion let me change that to—what she *will* become." Without pausing, he continued to speak. . .: "and this poem—what I was leading up to—was a dedication of the poem to the President-elect Mr. John Finley."

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In fact, this was a prosy improvisation on a previously agreed-upon revision to just one word in the final line. At Kennedy's request, Frost had allowed a substitution ("if only for a day," Kennedy had said) of "would" to "will"—the final words would read "such as she *will* become"—which the President thought "more positive-sounding" (278). And apparently, no one caught Frost's embarrassing blunder. John Huston Finley, Jr., was a Harvard professor of Classics; it appears Frost simply confused their names. In any case, the great poet left the rostrum to applause and Kennedy was administered his oath of office.

This uncharacteristically brief live poetry reading reveals that, for Frost, a poem is not a steady thing. It can be revised for an occasion. (It can also be the site of unadulterated error, something different from revision.) One implication of this is that Frost's poems can be understood in dramatically different ways according to their spoken contexts. As Marit MacArthur points out, following the Kennedy reading "The Gift Outright" has been interpreted as endorsing "triumphant nationalism" and "a celebration of colonialism" (63). It's true that this reading corresponds to Frost's own gloss of the poem around this time as being "about the Revolutionary War," as he put it in a November 29, 1960 talk at Dartmouth College (*Speaking on Campus* 137). Pushing this reading even further, he says the poem depicts a "conflict of good and good not good and bad. . . .The British colonial system was a good thing, but we got going ourselves." Some have followed Frost's self-analysis. Reading the poem as an apology for colonialism, Tyler Hoffman wonders at Frost's "blindness" to "the abuses and systematic oppression of native peoples" and quotes the Irish writer Tom Paulin, who critiques the poem's claim to Manifest Destiny and what Hoffman refers to as "Frost's dismissal of American Indian culture" (207). Yet without the framing device of a presidential inauguration to guide such an interpretation (indeed, Hoffman situates the poem in just that context), MacArthur shows through close reading of Frost's notebooks, letters, and the poem's ambiguous final lines that "The Gift Outright" was originally a response to New Deal policies (it was written in 1935 though not published until 1942), which Frost notoriously despised, and the "careless attitude of the American people toward the American landscape" (67) and native populations. Writes MacArthur, this poem displays "measured contempt" (69) for the "we" of the poem—colonials ourselves, no doubt. Further complicating matters, the poem's original publication, in a 1942 issue of *Virginia Quarterly Review*

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on the progress of the war, suggests what MacArthur calls "uncertainty" (63) about that event rather than sure-footed patriotism. Perhaps Kennedy should have asked for more tweaking.

So what does this tell us about Robert Frost and live reading? One answer is that readings ensured Frost's poems would remain interpretively labile; poems written decades earlier could become, simply by voicing them in a new context, relevant to changed social and political circumstances. Another example: at a Harvard reading on December 2, 1962, after he had returned from a well-publicized trip to the Soviet Union, Frost remarks after being asked to read "Mending Wall" that "it didn't have any politics in it when I wrote it." He clearly gauged the social dynamics that had transformed his 1914 poem, about two neighbors locked in a fearsome ritual of border maintenance, into a Cold War allegory—a process expertly detailed by George Monteiro—and willingly acknowledged and even exploited them.[1] Just as "The Gift Outright" absorbs and recirculates timely inflections at Kennedy's inauguration, so "Mending Wall" is yoked into post-War politics at Harvard. This process suggests how much Frost treated readings as opportunities to politicize his poems in response to particular audiences. At Harvard, Frost admits of the newfound politics of the poem as he relates what he told Kruschev in their brief meeting in Moscow:

> You eased down from the harshness of some of, some of your doctrines to somewhere near socialism, I suppose, and we're straining upward, over my dead body, straining upward through phases of the welfare statism [*sic*], a kind of socialism too, and now we must be so close together in socialism that we should be sociable.

In Frost's facetious manner, the joke scolds a politically liberal Harvard audience by suggesting that "our side" is slipping dangerously close to Soviet socialism. From this vantage, "Mending Wall" updates an earlier work into current contextual terms for the sake of a coterie he may well wish to admonish.

It would be a mistake to take away from these examples merely that Frost was a contextual opportunist who drafted audiences and occasions to the work of re-imagining his poems. In fact, I argue in this essay something far more ambitious: that poetry readings offered Frost a site for questioning the very identity of lyric poetry itself. What is a written

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poem's relationship to the voice? How do writing and speaking correspond in a poem? From where does a poem's authentic voice derive? Experienced readers of Frost know these questions to be among the poet's most fundamental literary concerns and the live poetry reading offers him an occasion to work them out, and often with paradoxical results. The above episodes reveal that the occasion of a reading itself could mold a poem's reception, and in numerous other ways—speaking in vocal tones, rearranging sequences, commenting within and across readings, and intersplicing poems with paratexts and asides extraneous to the poems themselves—Frost destabilized the ideal of coherent, self-enclosed lyric unity. And yet I also describe an opposing agency in Frost's work, arguing that the sound of voice—his inflections and rhythms when reading aloud in a style that I will follow Frost in calling "humanist"—manifests the idea that readings summon into being the original forces that created the poem. The humanist voice claims creative authenticity and endurance by reuniting the poet with the moment of *poesis,* returning him to the poem's ontological source. In "The Figure a Poem Makes," Frost describes this humanist permanence of creative genesis:

> A poem may be worked over once it is in being, but may not be worried into being. Its most precious quality will remain its having run itself and carried away the poet with it. Read it a hundred times: it will forever keep its freshness as metal keeps its fragrance. It can never lose its sense of a meaning that once unfolded by surprise as it went. (*Prose* 133)

Frost's language bestows upon the poem a definite pronoun—"it"—and stakes its claim for changeless endurance, even though it's one that emerged spontaneously "by surprise." His readings capture this friction between incorruptible "freshness" and opportunistic change, and in this dialectic they functioned as dramatizations of this condition, that of poetry itself. As spoken performances of written texts, readings allowed Frost not to solve this problem but to work it through.

While this essay concerns Robert Frost's live readings, it also points to the way oral performance has been largely overlooked in modernist studies. One reason is a simple limitation of access: most of my primary source material has been gathered from archived recordings of Frost reading at Harvard and the Library of Congress. I listened to these on

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audiotape cassettes housed in the Woodberry Poetry Room in Harvard's Lamont Library, and others in the LOC's sound reference center.[2] Unless one actually travels to such archives, access to Frost's recordings is limited because his estate will not allow online clips to be published, except in the case of a university making files available to its own students (such is the case at Harvard). This itself is a significant limitation as, in recent years, online sites have become rich storehouses of recordings, most notably the Pennsound archive and Ubuweb. The bulk of these recordings, however, are of more recent and typically avant-garde poetries. Modernist poets obviously recorded less frequently than the next generation but there's more to the problem than that. As Derek Furr points out, more recent poets conduct "experiments in sound, or sound and technology, deconstruct presence and redefine the boundaries of the poetical" (9), making recording more apparently essential to their work. And for post-World War II American poets, Michael Davidson says, "a new oral impulse served as a corrective to the rhetorically controlled, print-based poetry of high modernism" (97), making reading and orality essential aspects of their work. Thus for many such figures, recording (and the "oral impulse" that drives it) has become more than a means toward preservation or reproduction; through its use in the process of composition it has become part of the work itself. For example, the avant-garde poet David Antin tapes his own spontaneous "talking" and then transcribes and lineates the recording, making the poem's existence an interplay of speaking, technological reproduction, and writing.[3] Antin may provide a radically different poetic than Frost, but even scanning the contents of two major essay collections on recorded poetries—*Sound States: Innovative Poetics and Acoustical Technologies*, edited by Adalaide Morris (1997) and *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word*, edited by Charles Bernstein (1998)—suggests the emphasis on contemporaneity, experiment, and performance. Subjects considered in these books include John Cage, Caribbean performance, poetry slams, Black Arts reading, and Hawaiian pidgin literature (though two essays on modernists do appear in Morris's volume, one on Joyce and the other on H. D.).[4] As a modernist so closely associated with the page, and with such limited access to his live recordings, Frost's identity as a performer has been overlooked; this dearth of critical attention is doubly odd as readings so clearly dramatize ideas central to his self-descriptions as a poet.[5]

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Frost and the spoken voice

Before moving on to the recordings themselves, I want to emphasize how important spoken language was for Frost. As a child, Frost's mother, Belle, often read to him from Bible stories, Walter Scott's *Tales of a Grandfather, The Poems of Ossian,* and Thomas Hughes's 1857 novel *Tom Brown's Schooldays,* one of Frost's childhood favorites that Belle reread aloud often (Thompson, *Early Years* 69). In fact, Frost's mother read so much Frost claimed he didn't silently read an entire book by himself until age fourteen (72). All of this reading aloud had some odd consequences. Frost recorded experiences of "second hearing," or hearing voices in his head, an imaginative experience likely suggested by his mother's love of the Scottish fabulist George Macdonald's dreamlike stories of fairies and the spirit world (36). This stress on reading or speaking aloud at home was also reinforced at school for much of Frost's life, though he wasn't always comfortable speaking aloud. Studying Classics at the Lawrence High School entailed frequent "recitations" before the whole class, events that set his nerves on edge (79). And though Frost was also an enthusiastic member of the Debating Union, his first important speaking engagement—giving the valedictory speech at his high school's graduation ceremony—sent him into such agonies of nervous consternation that when he arrived on stage he fumbled awkwardly through his well-prepared speech (130), prompting the Lawrence *Eagle-Tribune* to remark that "its merits might have been shown to better advantage in a more natural delivery" (qtd. in Thompson 132). As Frost's career unfolded, his poetry would often quite literally inscribe voice into poems, from the dialogues in *North of Boston* (1914) to the late *A Masque of Reason* (1945). He would also take a particular interest in Shakespeare's dramatic works and the drama in general as a teacher at Pinkerton Academy, where he helped students stage plays and masques by Marlowe, Milton, Sheridan, and Yeats (*Prose* 75). And of course, he would often comment (in writing) about "the sound of sense" and "sentence sounds" (discussed below).

That such engagement with spoken language constituted repeated and important literary experiences for Frost is not a mere peculiarity of his biography. Live reading was a crucial part of American culture in the late nineteenth century, especially in the northeast where it was typically employed as a pedagogical tool for moral guidance. Lesley Wheeler points to conventions of reading poems aloud in a variety of social institutions,

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including "drawing rooms and salons, clubs, churches, cabarets and cafés, universities and schools of all levels, libraries, bookshops, and concert halls" (4). Joan Shelley Rubin's *Songs of Ourselves* (2007), a social history of poetry in America, describes the schoolroom during this period as "the most consistent and predictable" (107) venue for reading verse aloud, though a variety of occasions—including holiday celebrations, commencement events, elocution contests, and pageants—kept reading aloud a vibrant part of American life. These readings often delivered moral instructions. One popular idea at the time involved the metaphor of a "memory gem" (110)—a passage of poetry or prose that students could commit to memory and then rely upon for moral guidance. Students would memorize and recite Holmes's "The Chambered Nautilus" or Bryant's "Thanatopsis" to derive clear "lessons of the text" (114). Implying that poems contain incorruptible and stable ethical formulae, this model persisted for decades into the twentieth century, when there was a shift from an emphasis on moral instruction per se to what the Deweyan educator Sterling Andrus Leonard described as "true, and significant experience" and a process redolent of humanist authenticity, called "re-enactment" between reader and writer (qtd. in Rubin 129). A passage from a 1934 pedagogy textbook links the reader to the writer in terms of a shared encounter: "Only when the teacher learns that poetry and prose were written chiefly to be re-experienced or relived by the reader can we begin to hope that children will learn to like to read excellent things." Still, these examples imply that poetry contains something stable at the core; the literary ambiguity New Critics would champion decades later had no place in such reenactments. Frost would continue to work within this paradigm over the course of his life, maintaining in some way, however compromised and complicated, a sense of a poem's unshakable identity of meaning.

Outside of the schoolroom, orality was often privileged over the material text. Ingrid Satelmajer describes oral poetry during Frost's childhood years and later as holding a "constant and prominent role at public events" (205), with printed matter—newspapers and periodicals—typically providing a "performance text" (207) to be voiced by readers. Likewise, Joan Newlon Radner describes the lyceums of northern New England at mid-century as places where orality dominated literacy and reading functioned as a form of social cohesion, or "improvement" (176). During lyceum events, participants would hand-write a "newspaper" full

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of real and fabricated news, poems, stories and other items, then read and discuss them aloud. These events included "declamations, recitations, dialogues, essays, lectures, mock trials, public critiques of the presentations, and oral performances" (177). While it's impossible to know exactly what remainders of this cultural emphasis on reading and orality Frost imbibed during his childhood, his lifelong emphasis on reading and internalizing poems is of a piece with this New England orality. The crowd's cheering at Frost's abandonment of the material text at Kennedy's inaugural in favor a "poem I can say to you without seeing it" suggests the cultural durability of such scenes for all involved.

As Frost developed as a poet he read often, despite debilitating nervousness and stage fright. In fact, as he matured readings and talks became a regular part of his life and a reliable source of his personal income. By 1920 he was earning between $50 and $100 per appearance, not a small sum at the time, and that rate would steadily increase over his lifetime (Thompson, *Triumph* 150). Frost eventually became such an iconic stage reader of poetry that the middle generation's own premier declaimer, Allen Ginsberg, called him one of poetry's "original entrepreneurs" of live reading (qtd. in Parini 319). Yet for Frost, readings were never simply recitations or vocalizations of a series of poems as we might expect from either his schoolroom experiences or readings by poets today. As Lorenzo Thomas has argued, poetry readings need to be carefully historicized based on the implicit social conventions that guide their procedures (301). Frost's reading style is most closely associated with the "poet-performer movement" described by Paul H. Gray, in which poets like James Whitcomb Riley, Edna Wheeler Wilcox, and Vachel Lindsay read a "petit-bourgeois" style of platform poetry mostly to "farmers, merchants, salesmen, and housewives" centered on the dramatic performance of the poems themselves, as well as the bucolic population they represented.[6] Listening to Frost's many recordings, and reading the 27 transcriptions of readings and excerpts of readings recently collected in *Robert Frost Speaking on Campus* (2009), it's clear that Frost drew upon this platform tradition, what Lesley Wheeler describes as "lecture-recitals" and "reading-lectures," typical of "popular lecture tours of the nineteenth century" (9). In the introduction to *Speaking on Campus,* David Shribman describes Frost as a "'performance artist' before the term existed" (xx) though his talks were fairly predictable in form. They featured the poet standing at a lectern and speaking into a microphone, usually on a particular theme, and intermit-

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tently reading poems (at the Rocky Mountain Writers' Conference it was "What Poetry Thinks of Our Age" [Thompson, *Triumph* 424]; at the Winter Institute of Literature at the University of Miami, "The Uses of Ambiguity" [434]; for the Charles Eliot Norton lectures at Harvard in 1936, "The Renewal of Words" [444]). This style ensures that Frost will begin offering some kind of framing as he moves along, making evident the interpretive malleability described above.

Yet Frost's ideas about voice and lyric suggest not malleability but rootedness in the fundament of authentically spoken language, making simple claims about contextual framing and reframing difficult. As Frost writes in a letter to Sidney Cox, the "living part of a poem is the intonation entangled somehow in the syntax idiom and meaning of a sentence. It is only there for those who have heard it previously in conversation" (*Letters* 107). For Frost, speaking always comes first and the figure of the writer is a kind of textual shaman, locating, absorbing, and alienating the immediate idiom into the symbolic order:

> I say you cant [*sic*] read a single good sentence with the salt in it unless you have previously heard it spoken. Neither can you with the help of all the characters and diacritical marks pronounce a single word unless you have previously heard it actually pronounced. Words exist in the mouth not in books. You can't fix them and you dont [*sic*] want to fix them. You want them to adapt their sounds to persons and places and times. You want them to change and be different. I shall be sorry when everybody is so public-schooled that nobody will dare to say Haow for What. It pleases me to contemplate the word Sosieti that the reformers sport on their door plate in a street in London. The two i's are bad enough. But the o is what I love. (*Letters* 108)

In Frost's orality, the spoken voice represents connection to "persons and places and times" that print loses without a periodic retuning. Above, the solecism "sosieti" has the virtue of the insistent /o/ inflected, presumably, by a middle-class speaker (as opposed to "real" society member).

Yet even these "sentence sounds" (*Letters* 111) and "sound-posture" (qtd. in Newdick 4), as Frost calls them—which posit that tone and vocal inflection in spoken language must be captured in writing to give it "life"—are fringed with cautionary distance and begin to express a basic tension between writing and speech. For example, who is it that's

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writing the words Frost records? When Frost says a "man is all a writer if *all* his words are strung on definite recognizable sentence sounds," the writer is figured as a cultural elite who transforms (rather than inhabits) these sounds "fresh from talk, where they grow spontaneously" (*Letters* 111). Thus the very idea of sentence sounds already situates the writer of them at a remove; sentence sounds sound to the *writer,* not the talker, for whom this would all be beside the point.[7] Writing to Lincoln MacVeagh, Frost plays this role of linguistic anthropologist by phonetically translating the "sentence sounds" of New Orleans, where he had recently been, in a way that clearly reveals this status of the outsider: "What I suppose I felt coming on was the dengue (pronounced dang you) fever from a mosquito bite I got on my first day at New Orleans (pronounced differently from the way I was accustomed to pronounce it)" (Thompson, *Triumph* 213). So "sentence-sounds are very definite entities," as Frost wrote to John Bartlett; they are "apprehended by the ear. They are gathered by the ear from the vernacular and brought into books" (*Letters* 111). And yet they are also in need of the writer's aid and assistance. In this way, Frost follows a particular three-step process: (1) he marshals "definite" sounds "gathered by the ear"; (2) drawing on them he creates written texts that end up dead or dying in print; (3) Frost then breathes them back into life through his voice. Reading is in this way a work of reanimation that captures Frost's nuanced sense of talk and text.

Humanist reading and performance

One way of accounting for this quality of presence and absence, identity and deconstruction, in Frost's readings is to conceive of them as *performance,* a term that captures the double-nature of Frost's acts of "reanimation" described above. Performance is a crucial word, complicating popular and critical assumption that spoken voice is saturated with authenticity and resists its material condition—or what I am here calling *humanist* reading. I'll outline this humanist style briefly before articulating Frost's performative mode.

In humanist reading, voice is conceived as coextensive with self and the speaking of writing reanimates language with the original creative impulsion that generated it. This is similar to what the critic Maria Damon calls the "relatively recent (i.e., post-Romantic) inner-directed lyric tradition" (332), in which fusing, or fusing once again, a written poem

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and the speaking of that poem is a reading's central function. Another way of saying this is that humanist reading imagines that poet and poem cohere in a speech act that itself reconstructs the original moment of *poesis,* the "voicing" of truth. This is perhaps the best-represented mainstream attitude toward the value of poetry readings, an attitude John Glassco dismisses as the "naïve listener's belief that he is getting 'closer' to a poem by hearing it from the poet himself" (qtd. in *Close Listening* 263). Bernard Richards calls the equation of recorded voice with authenticity the "phonographic fallacy" (qtd. in Prins 47). At stake in this equation is what I am calling the humanist voice, which seeks to reunite poem and human subject-speaker, to reanimate the dead letter of text.

"Orality" is a similar term that should be distinguished here. Walter J. Ong's description of orality as prior to writing pictures is that it is a linear progression: "primary" orality is the universal condition of language, and alphabetic literacy is a development of it, in which the written becomes a "residue" of speech (11). For Ong, an oral utterance is historically prior to written text, even though—like Frost's description of the cultural elite capturing sentence sounds—literacy "enhanced" (9) the spoken by allowing it to be ordered, studied, objectified, and developed in complexity. When critics use the term "orality," they mean something like what Ong describes. Jacques Roubaud's recent "Prelude: Poetry and Orality," for example, argues that the printing press created a "breaking of the bond between word and sound" so profound that it "brought about a new double form called poetry" that ensured the "indissociable" nature of speech and writing (18). Roubaud imagines the poet as a preservationist of primary orality. Humanist reading, however, is more concerned with the notion of recapture or reanimation described above rather than the simple fact of oral primacy.

To be sure, these ideas are closely knitted. Frost himself equates humanism with orality in his essay "The Figure a Poem Makes," calling "the humanist" one who can write sentence sounds—one "who cares how sound a poem is if it is only *a* sound" (*Prose* 131).[8] Poetic genesis relies upon the act as an imitable moment, one that "can never lose its sense of a meaning that once unfolded by surprise as it went" (133) in the famous formulation cited above. The essential word here is "once"—at the moment of poetic generation the poet "snatches a thing" from time and captures it. This marks the poem as fossilized inspiration, and so to read a poem aloud is to make it a living, fleshly thing again. This humanist

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assumption of poetic durability is easily visible today as part of the machinery of reception surrounding Frost's marketed recordings. In a blurb written by Billy Collins for the back of Frost's CD for *The Voice of the Poet* series, for example, Collins prepares thousands of contemporary listeners to receive Frost's words in just this humanist manner, drawing on the very same language of "re-enactment" used by the Deweyan educator Sterling Andrus Leonard. Collins writes:

> To hear a poem spoken in the voice of the person who wrote it is not only to witness the rising of words off the page and into the air, but to experience an aural reenactment of exactly what the poet must have heard, if only internally, during the act of composition.

One couldn't find a more succinct description of humanist reading than the phrase "aural reenactment." Embedded in Collins's logic is the idea of the pre-linguistic, or rhapsodic voice of poetry as described by Plato's *Ion*—trapped in the nets of the poem, then released again when voiced.

But it isn't quite as tidy as that for Frost himself. In fact, Frost's reading recalls this idea's virtual opposite as well: Derrida's understanding of linguistic absence. For Derrida, Ong's oralist hierarchy of speech/writing displayed above is only seemingly stable. True, what "disappears" in writing, Derrida argues, "is the self-identity of the origin, the self-presence of so-called living speech" (296). And yet, he asks, "is not the center, the absence of play and différence, another name for death? The death which reassures and appeases, but also, with its hole, creates anguish and puts at stake?" (297). Paradoxically for Derrida, the absence of a voice *legitimates* writing by acknowledging its remoteness from speaking presence but celebrating it for that very fidelity to the true condition of speech itself—which is absence, what Derrida calls *différence*. As seen above, Frost considers voice as a fabled precursor to written language, which can only approximate speech in its inevitable absence from the page. In this way, Frost's celebrated concern for the "sound of sense" in poetry actually evades, or even represses, the presence of a speaker in favor of the text that will "speak" in the speaker's absence, that will be authenticated by the supposed reproduction of its own primacy. This is why the figure of the writer is important in Frost's description above—the poet gathers the sentence sounds and vouches for their authenticity, but inevitably muffles them in the process of writing them down. So as Frost tantalizingly posits

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voice as the dead-center and "absence of play," he swerves toward that voice's distribution into de-voiced, printed poem. While Frost is no post-structuralist, then, Derrida's critique of the speech/text dichotomy does serve to complicate too easy an assumption about vocal "reenactment."

Historically speaking, however, listeners have consistently perceived Frost's spoken poems as redolent with authenticity. He is typically received in these humanist terms as "natural," "spontaneous," "sincere," and "informal," all terms that suggest the immediacy and presence of the poet. *The Washington Post*, quoted above, called the Kennedy inaugural reading "natural," for example. Reginald Cook's 1956 article "Notes on Frost the Lecturer" refers to his "human aspects" and "natural presence" (qtd. in *Campus* xx). After a 1920 reading in Arlington, Vermont, that town's *Banner* newspaper describes Frost's "utter quiet sincerity," and recalls that to "the large and breathlessly attentive audience which gathered at Mrs. Gilchrist's house to hear him, he read poem after poem as though he were that moment composing them; as though they were as new to him as to anyone" (qtd. in Thompson, *Triumph* 147). Sometimes this humanist reception is coded as "informality," as in the Michigan *Daily* after Frost read at the University of Michigan in 1921 that twice in one paragraph employed the phrase "complete informality" (177). In the college paper after a 1935 reading at Amherst, a student anticipated Collins' humanist framing, writing that the poet "gives us the feeling that we are attendant at the process of creation" itself (417).

Conceiving of Frost's poems in terms of "performance," however, offers a helpful corrective to humanist listening. In her recent study of poetry slams, Susan Somers-Willett refers to the form of reception described above as privileging "authenticity," a term she explores by reference to key texts in post-structuralist performance studies, by J. L. Austin, Judith Butler, Erving Goffman, and Jacques Lacan. Indeed, performance studies as a discipline offers a lens through which to view Frost's ambivalence about his lyric voice: Is it authentic and humanist or not? Can speech be faithfully represented or is it warped by shamanistic reanimation? Are we hearing authentic sentence sounds or is reading opportunistic lyric refashioning? Accounts of performance by Peggy Phelan and Philip Auslander capture this radical ambivalence regarding the status of performance and its relationship to the real by articulating the status of performance itself. According to Phelan, performance (which includes any kind of staged reading), "implicates the real" by the "presence of living bodies" (148) on

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stage. For Phelan, live bodies on stage attain a kind of ontological veracity, something that can have no copies, or "left-overs," as it is pure vertiginous presence, a "maniacally charged present." (In this way, it should be said, recordings of readings are just the kinds of "left-overs" that are indeed mere traces of what has ineluctably disappeared.) "Performance," as she says, "honors the idea that a limited number of people in a specific time/space frame can have an experience of value which leaves no visible trace afterward" (149). This further raises questions about the oral impulse behind poems themselves, which we have seen function as "traces" of what Erving Goffman would call performances of "everyday life." For Phelan, however, these questions are endemic to understanding performance itself and point to a crucial tension: as the body can't sustain its status as an object of pure presence, the performer actually "disappears" to represent something different, something beyond the performer—the body, the work, the text. In Frost's case, of course, it's the poem itself. As Phelan puts it, a performance "uses the body to frame the lack of being promised by and through the body" (151). In performance, something always escapes that we can never fully apprehend or indeed record, though it's always fully and tantalizingly on display.

Philip Auslander's essay "Liveness" also plumbs this question of authenticity and arrives at a similar sense of performance's representational ambivalence. The idea of "live," Auslander argues, is facilitated by its recordability; without recording, liveness wouldn't, and in fact didn't exist (198). For Auslander, liveness has indeed become "the realm of the authentic" (207), because it can be *made* inauthentic through the distinction between performance and technological reproduction. In this inversion, the live depends upon the recorded, not vice versa. Phelan stresses performance's ambivalent relation to the real; here, liveness balances precariously on its own opposition. While Frost captures immediacy and presence by staging a written text, it's the knowledge of textual existence itself that suffuses a performance with its capacity for authenticity. Joseph Roach has argued recently in the pages of *PMLA* that performance is "Orphic," always glancing back as it moves forward, "authorized by something prior, even when it isn't" (1078). Frost is a performer in this sense: he looks toward the immediacy of the stage and simultaneously back to the creation of the poem itself. His readings are reconstructions of this precise tension between humanistic reading—in which a poem is "re-enacted" as a bodily presence—and skeptical deconstruction—in which, as Roach puts it, poetry becomes a "figural substitution" of the real (1085).

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How this tension plays out in actual performances is the focus of the remainder of this essay. In what follows, I describe how Frost's archival readings may be understood as themselves negotiating this Orphic tension between humanist orality and conceptualizations of voice damningly aware of their performed condition. On the one hand, through writings, staged phrasings and performances of authenticity, Frost invokes a humanism of voice. Yet he also reverses this equation by destabilizing the centrality and singularity of the voice itself in the performance of poetic inflection, sequence, commentary, and interruption. If Frost has generally presented himself and been received as a humanist reader, I hope to show that this style is constantly undermined—or dramatically complicated—by his own tendency to challenge the orthodoxy and boundary of his lyric productions. In proposing to read Frost's vocal accent, inflection, and associations against his humanist style, I am engaging something analogous to what Jerome McGann has termed the "bibliographic code" (16), his name for the semiotics of text. For the purposes of this argument, perhaps this semiotic environment surrounding—and produced by—a voiced poem could be called the poem's audiographic code.

Robert Frost live

What does this humanist reading actually sound like? For one thing, it is never produced without a clear sense of an opposing, skeptical tension. Deep listening to Frost's recordings reveals that one of his habitual cadences is to play two central accentual strategies of voice against each other. What I call "sighing" functions as a trope for humanist expression. What I call "tumbledown" phrasing runs against the grain of sighing by self-consciously citing its own discomfort with literariness. Together, they sound as an audible allegory of Frost's persistent tension between the authentic and staged.

"Sighing" is the raising of vocal pitch, elongations of vowels, and what can sound like a singing of the syllables being sighed; like an actual sigh, the breath leaves the throat in an easy, mournful release. Frost's most notable sigh, one he can be heard to perform in virtually every recording of the poem, is found in the line from "The Road Not Taken," "all the difference." As he approaches the word "all," Frost raises his voice, pinches his larynx tight, and quivers the line of the word, seeming for a moment to almost sing it. The trope of sighing likely derives from Victorian lyric

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conventions of reading that suggested the emotive expressivity of poetic language that speaks from the oracular impulse. Citing early recordings of Tennyson, Jed Rasula calls this style "chanted not spoken, an incantation not a recital," and notes the phenomena of the "vowel drone" (235). He quotes Ford Maddox Ford in what is an exemplary description of Victorian reading, remembered from Ford's childhood:

> Mournfully, then, up and down the staircases, there would flow two hollow sounds. For, in those days, it was the habit of all poets and poetesses to read aloud upon every possible occasion, and whenever they read aloud to employ an imitation of the voice invented by the late Lord Tennyson, and known, in those days, as the *ore rotundo*—"with the round mouth mouthing out their hollow o's and a's." (236)

The sigh evokes this mournful, elegiac Victorian sound and serves, for Frost, as a signifier of intense emotional authenticity and pitch. (Of course, its repeated use and possibly Victorian origins suggests the sigh is already a *trope* of humanist reading.) Richard Poirier's description of Frost's "extravagance" of meaning is also a useful comparison here. Extravagance, for Poirier, is "the enactment of any search for possibilities other than those already domesticated" (89), literally the "walking beyond" or extension of the ordinary into the unexpected and revelatory. Extravagance can be expressed in Frost's vocal dialectic between ordinary and enriched spoken vocabularies. "With what seems to me an admirable evidence of human sympathy and poetic daring," Poirier writes, "'extravagance' in Frost can be made to reside often in the most quiet of those idiomatic phrases by which, in ordinary speech, we unknowingly talk in visionary language" (91). Frost's sighs often walk language beyond itself to create an aural seme of what Poirier suggests is merely inherent in words alone.

Diametric to the sigh is "tumbledown" phrasing: rushed, quick, flat, and impatient to achieve its end. Tumbledown is the opposite of sigh, it shortens caesuras and gaps between words, obliterating effects of enjambment and meter, and pragmatically seeking to finish as quickly as possible, speaking as if time were money. As counterpoint to the sigh, which extends and caresses, tumbledown eradicates what Nick Piombino calls the "aural ellipsis" of spoken language, in which the listener is granted affective agency by being able to "weave into any elliptical speech act certain elements of his or her internal experience" (54). Tumbledown is

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the voice of auction, barter, and transaction. If the aural ellipsis of the sigh signifies the poignancy and connotative capacity of words that carry more weight than words in everyday speech, tumbledown strips them of their plangent qualities. Where the sigh embarrasses words with extravagance, tumbledown divests them of it.

Three readings of "The Road Not Taken" reveal how Frost plays these two phrasings against each other, the one insisting on literary emotiveness, the other dismissing it with a shrug. (This is a particularly useful poem to study in this context because its popular reception as earnest advice has been shown to stand at odds with Frost's claim about the poem's true intention—that it is what George Monteiro calls a "sly jest" [*Robert Frost* 47] aimed at his friend Edward Thomas for his often regretful speculations on what might have been. Thus the poem's reception reveals the poles of sincerity and deflection already at play.) At a March 13, 1962 reading at Harvard, less than a year before his death, Frost says after being asked to read "Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening" and "The Road Not Taken": "I know what you're thinking, and I'm thinking it too. Can a poem get too [pause] worn, you know, too much read?" He then compares himself to Longfellow, a poet overshadowed by his own popular success, and ends with an appeal: "Anyway, I'm going to say those poems, have mercy upon them, be merciful. Don't get tired of them, please." In this reading, tumbledown appears to signify this prefigured impatience (performed or genuine) with the burden of these poems, while the sighing honors the audience's desire to hear them; it is as if Frost is denying in one line what he willingly grants in the next. This is especially important for Frost to stress at a Harvard reading, where he can be sure most of his audience knows these works well. During a reading of "The Road Not Taken" later that same year (on December 2), Frost sighs the words "fair" in line six, "really about the same" in line 10, "kept the first" in line 13, and "wood, and I— / I" in lines 18 and 19. The rest of the poem flashes by with tumbledown speed, except for the final line's "all," which Frost attenuates into a long, quavering, emphatic admonition. In 1955, Frost sighs "just as fair" in line six, "I kept the first" in line 13, and "I shall be telling this" in 16. So while precisely the same words within "The Road Not Taken" aren't always read sigh or tumbledown, these two registers demarcate dialogic positions on the audiographic grid to contend for the speaker's mood. In this poem in particular, tonal indecisiveness stands in distinction to the speaker's seeming clarity of choice about the road not

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taken. The voiced poem registers ambivalence about its own willingness to afford this event the meaning it seems to more reliably perform in print. That is, is he really so certain of the road not taken? This all has clear implications for a critical understanding of the poem. For example, Tyler Hoffman reads "The Road Not Taken" as permeated with "intonational ambiguity," especially in the final lines:

> If we hear the final statement ["I took the road less traveled by, / And that has made all the difference"] as heartfelt, absent a moralizing strain, we probably regard the speaker with some sympathy, as symbolic of the human propensity to construct fictions to justify choices made in clouded circumstances. But if it strikes our ear as sententious, we are more likely to laugh at his expense, to mock his pretentiousness. Frost permits us to hear the final statement in at least these two ways, perhaps at different stages of our life, even as we register its irony, and so encourages us to come to terms with our vexed attitudes about what it means to fashion a personal history. (113)

While this is an astute reading of the poem's essential "intonational ambiguity," it's hard not to be swayed by Frost's sighing "all" when he sighs it, hard not to be pulled more closely toward a laugh at the speaker's expense—if only for that reading and that moment.

"Birches," another poem Frost was often asked to say at readings, is also one he repeatedly bifurcates into sigh and tumbledown, as the March 13, 1962 reading demonstrates. This reading shows Frost deploying these two phonal registers not only against each other, but also against the presence or absence of tropes in the poem. This means that metaphor is read tumbledown, and flatter, expository writing is read sigh, creating another form of counterpoint in the poem: figurative language and poetic affect are both admitted into the inflective repertoire, but denied their full authority as modes of speech. Reliably vacillating between sigh phrasing and tumbledown, Frost signifies the tensions between extravagant poet and pragmatic farmer. Thus "stay" at the end of line four and "themselves" at the end of line seven are sighed, and then, as if to atone for this emotive double-punch, he runs through line 13, an insistently metaphoric line that suffocates, in this reading, from speed and compression. This tendency to countermand metaphor with rushed sound is also apparent in his speaking the striking simile "Like girls on hand and knees that throw

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their hair / Before them over their heads to dry in the sun," which Frost speeds through, as if to deny the lines' affective heft. Yet the relatively quiescent "boy" in line 23 and "all there was" in line 32 are sighed. These are innocuous, almost banal places for Frost's inflection to instantiate extravagance, and so he deploys dramatic inflection only when its semantic qualities are most muted. This self-inoculating pattern continues through the rest of the poem until line 53, when Frost slows his pace to signal the poem's ending (as he does in many readings of the shorter lyrics).[9] In the end, however, sigh and tumbledown phrasing work dialectically to signify extravagance in muted language. They play restraint against trope, humanism against occasion.

Contemporary listeners to Frost have often observed this effect of vocal tone playing dialectically against speaking subjects. For some, Frost's voice was distinctly modern in its rejection of fey Victorian aestheticism, the kind of Tennysonian *oro rotundo* mentioned above. Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant notes that Frost "enunciates in his dry, sly, halting way" so "different from the glib aestheticism his students might expect of a poet" (qtd. in Parini 450). Yet Sergeant's reading of Frost's voice is laden with belief in its authenticity and air of reality, clearly the product of her own readerly humanism. Sergeant's sense of Frost's "different" reading style reveals how well Frost was playing against older conventions of reading, and how his plain style sounded authentic by comparison to them. This comparative kind of listening, which hears something new and divergent in Frost's vocal accent, appears often in reactions to Frost's voice. Stanley Burnshaw recalls "that deep grainy voice—a voice that made other voices sound thin or abstract" (qtd in Parini 455). In 1937, Reginald Cook described Frost's voice in such capacious terms he sounds like Emerson's representative man, marrying the low ("Irish speech tones") and the high ("Miltonic eloquence") with democratic ease, his voice a casebook of jarring, dialogic self-styling:

> Frost's voice is medium in pitch, rather low than high, but not guttural; and it registers sensitively shades of feeling—elation or scorn, exultance or sadness. It is the voice of a man whose ear is in key, reproducing at will Irish speech tones or nuances in colloquial idiom or the blank-verse paragraphs of Miltonic eloquence. It is a voice easy to listen to all day long. (qtd. in Parini 352)

Listening to the BBC archive of Frost's radio talks in England, the English critic B. J. Sokal finds that Frost's occasional "growling tone of

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voice" was "premonitory to joshing lies," suggesting through mere tone the doubtfulness of his own self-representations as a "simple 'farmer' in 1914 Gloucestershire" (401). As accounts like Sergeant's, Burnshaw's, and Sokal's indicate, responses to Frost's voice are intense while also deft in drawing comparisons to a range of vocal speaking styles against which Frost's rhythms jibe. This accentuation of voice pluralizes the singularity of the lyric speaker, often introducing into the poem a baseline of irony.

Yet at many other times, Frost can be heard laying bare the machinery of tonal strategies for his audience in paratextual commentary, belying the humanist voice in a different way. This is particularly noticeable during readings at Harvard and the Library of Congress. Referring to a just-completed reading of "Lines Written in Dejection on the Eve of Great Success" in the December 2, 1962 reading, Frost informs his Harvard audience that the poem was really "countrified," and that "I said 'cow' like a Vermonter," suggesting how staged Frost imagines his accent to be. At a reading in the Library of Congress on October 24, 1955, Frost says after line 11 of "The Star-Splitter," "see, that's the New England accent." He often plays lecturer, pointing to the deliberate effects of his rhyming patterns, as in a talk in the Coolidge Auditorium of the Library of Congress to high school honors students. Reading "Departmental," he says, "see, I'm gonna emphasize the rhymes," and goes on to move through the poem leaning on each end rhyme with a hammy insistence on their comedic effects. Such moments serve not to establish his authenticity as a reader or to dramatize (and it would be a dramatization) Leonard's "re-enactment," but to play with tropes in audiography.

This phenomenon is perhaps most conspicuous and complicated in Frost's numerous recordings of "The Witch of Coös," where he acts the characters of Mother and Son to the hilt. Katherine Kearns has argued that "Coös" allegorizes voice in poetry, particularly "the potential of sound to circumvent or supersede stated meaning" through the figures of mother, son, and speaker/stranger, each "standing for" subtext, articulation, and imposition of meaning, respectively (123). An audiographic variant like the October 24, 1955 reading at the Library of Congress adds a fourth figure, the reader himself—i.e., Robert Frost—tempering and manipulating the poem's speakers much more like a stage manager than a rhapsode. He reads line 27 ("We'll never let them, will we, son? We'll never!") thin and pinched, the dropped /r/'s disappearing in craggy, throaty aitches and the final two syllables forming a hard, wailing spondee—"NE-VAH!" In

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the context of the "two old-believers" of line three, the speaker appears as a less rural and worldlier New Englander. His accent is far less attenuated, implying that the "mother" and "son" are worthy of aural reproduction, as well as his own (and his readers') difference from them. A print reader might suspect the speaker's implied difference by virtue of the poem's mere existence, yet all we know of him from text derives from the poem's first three lines, which foreground "talking" itself as the poem's subject: "I stayed the night for shelter at a farm / Behind the mountain, with a mother and son, / Two old-believers. They did all the talking" (202). There is nothing suggesting his difference carries great significance except, perhaps, that he defines them as "old-believers," the implication being that he is not one of them. Yet in the voiced poem, this reminder of their virtually anthropological significance, evidenced by their "talking," is now a dramatized fact apparent in every line and maintained as the subject of the poem. Read aloud, the characters serve as emblems of cracked New England spiritualism, and the distance of the speaker from them rings out in every line. To underscore this gap, Frost often "directs" his audience by stepping outside the poem's narrative frame to offer stage directions, using paratextual phrases "and then he says," "and then she says" throughout. In this way, each line insists upon the marginal difference of speaker, mother, and son, suggesting a reader quite removed from the original creation of the poem, troping the voiced "The Witch of Coös" into a poem about the framing of voices.

Frost also controls audiographic effects and plays heightened expression off ironic distance by producing an expertly modulated vocal chiaroscuro, or deep contrast. In her liner notes for the 1976 Caedmon record of Frost reading at the 92nd Street Y in the early 1950s, the poet Grace Schulman suggests that Frost's vocal intonation plays contrapuntally against the bleak moral evacuation of a poem like "Fire and Ice." As she puts it, "absolute destruction [is] intensified by the speaker's calm manner." Essentially, Frost's voice in this reading could be described as "slow tumbledown"; it's monochromatic and dour, suggesting something either in denial of—or perhaps abjectly complicit with—the eschatological terror the poem projects. The tonal flatness also renders virtually inaudible the hard end-rhymes that might be interpreted as a reassuring familiarity and containment of this blighted millenarianism only in an unvoiced (printed) version of the poem. To be sure, Frost himself was aware of this possibility of vocal tone, as he writes in a letter to John Bartlett in 1914

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about sentence-sound, not literally meant to be, but figuratively standing for, spoken language: "Remember that the sentence sound often says more than the words. It may even as in irony convey a meaning opposite to the words" (*Letters* 113). In this most fundamental way, then, voicings of poems offer a literal tone that Frost can lay dialectically as an "oversound" against the poems' textual logic.

So far, I've been arguing that Frost's poetry performances deploy vocal tone as a way to look Orphically away from, and then back toward, the notion of humanist lyric. Yet as the reading at Kennedy's inaugural ceremonies suggests, the fixed notion of a Frost poem can also be framed by the way his readings readily accede to contextual interpretive demands; readings risk embodiment, animating the poem from its essential completeness, putting the spoken voice before a world of onlookers—an audience. Drawing on such an observation, Mark Richardson's *The Ordeal of Robert Frost* (1997) argues that Frost engages a dialectical struggle between "internal" and "external" motivations. Richardson interprets as emblematic Frost's claim that "Every poem is an epitome of the great predicament; a figure of the will braving alien entanglements" (qtd. in Richardson 2). His supple reading of Frost's lifelong negotiation between "will" and "entanglements" that are social, cultural, linguistic, and historical reveals how slippery notions of agency can be. When Frost claims in "The Figure a Poem Makes" that a poem "can never lose its sense of a meaning that once unfolded by surprise as it went" (*Prose* 133), Richardson points out that such a "transcendent" gesture as this will eventually lead Frost to "a fall out of agency and authority" (224). While such senses of meaning feel productive, they lead to various forms of "constriction." A mythic possessive individualism imagines some kind of shelter for a humanism of poetic expression, where the "surprise" of composition remains intact and can be reliably articulated:

> Frost shows us how true "authorial" agency lies much deeper, beneath the awareness even of the poet. And the partly mysterious encounter of authority and contingency on the stage of writing promises, in poetics, to place the poet in touch with these deeper possibilities of agency.

While Richardson's humanistic focus is on Frost's various struggles against "culture" and audience, I locate such trials in the metaphor of performance itself, literalizing what Richardson refers to as the "stage" of writing. Listening to Frost on real stages, we can glimpse this struggle between

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will and the contingencies of alien entanglement—the audience. This is what Judith Oster means when she claims "Frost's possessiveness of self and text was in conflict with the need to share them, to be read right by the right readers of both" (17).

Indeed, Frost is canny about negotiating such conflict. For example, after reading "Mending Wall" at a 1955 event, Frost runs in a joke so quickly, it sounds like a new ending:

> He will not go behind his father's saying,
> And he likes having thought of it so well
> He says again, "Good fences make good neighbors."
> Somebody else told me that good fences make good burglars.

While this typography deliberately fails to distinguish between poem and commentary, I cite it as an example of the qualities of a Frost reading, which is always choked with asides, additions, emendations, and subtractions that impinge in direct ways upon the poems that fall hacked and cajoled in their midst (we've already seen some of this in the Kennedy reading). If these additions and embellishments were recorded in print, a textualist like McGann would surely consider them variants, but as recorded on tape they do not seem to warrant that status. Yet they do help Frost manage and guide the reception of his poems by speaking diacritically before, during, and after performing. They also trouble a poem's sense of authentic reenactment.

Often, this process speaks as loudly as any tonal phrasing against the authenticity of humanistic reading. On March 28, 1954, Frost appeared in an interview with Edward Stanley on an NBC broadcast produced "in cooperation with" the National Council of Churches. The show begins abruptly with Stanley introducing Frost as "America's distinguished and much beloved poet" and asking him to read his poem "The Pasture." Frost obliges in guttural *craquelure*:

> I'm going out to clean the pasture spring;
> I'll only stop to rake the leaves away
> (And wait to watch the water clear, I may):
> I shan't be gone long. You come too.
>
> I'm going out to fetch the little calf
> That's standing by the mother. It's so young

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> It totters when she licks it with her tongue.
> I shan't be gone long. You come too.

When finished, Frost says: "Well, that's been taken as an introduction to several of my books; I suppose it's an invitation to read me." Stanley responds: "I suppose it's an invitation to reflect, too, that there might be some religious, uh, significance in such a simple act of clearing a spring." A quick study of Stanley's need to satisfy his religious sponsor, Frost obligingly rejoins: "I'm waiting for the water to clear itself, the spirit to come back." Frost's substitution of the word "spirit" for Stanley's more insistent "religious" signifies Frost's willingness to recognize NBC's underwriters while not entirely capitulating to their religious sponsorship. This particular "entanglement" with Stanley shades our understanding of a critical assessment of a poem like "The Pasture" such as Judith Oster's, which wonders about the "factual" nature of this poem and its ability to "stand alone and unassociated" (56) from figurative weight. This claim is surely compromised by Frost's appearance on NBC, where he capitulates to the "figure" suggested by Stanley.

Frost reads "A Soldier" next, a poem with a more immediately plausible "spiritual" interpretation. After he finishes, Stanley again tries to frame this poem as a religious meditation, carefully beginning with a comment on poetic form that leads him, via an unpersuasive free-association, to a "religious" one:

> I'm a little surprised, I don't know why I should be, to find you working in the sonnet form with so much discipline. It would be fair to say, wouldn't it, that, uh, there's some advantage to working in a, uh, formal style in poetry, as indeed there is some in religion too. The forms we observe.

Again, Frost obliges Stanley and NBC by saying his three-line poem "Pertinax," an epigrammatic acknowledgment of formal necessity, though he stops short of ascribing a "religious significance": "'Let chaos storm!/ let cloud shapes form (uh, let cloud shapes *swarm!*), / I wait for form.' That's one of mine, too." The misquotation of his own line suggests his general unease with being asked to fit his poems into this narrow interpretive frame.

In many of Frost's readings he discusses his thoughts on "religion" in clear, though quite different terms. The December 2, 1962 reading begins:

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> I want to start in by talking before I read the poems. I'm going to get to them as quickly as I can tonight. Uh, you know, you get warned, in anything you do, poetry, or, or art, that you better look out and not get too near the politicians, you better look out and not get too near the academicians, you better look out and not get too near the religious, I guess. They don't warn you about that as much as they should, maybe.

Comparing this with his comments to Stanley, reveals how well aware Frost was of audience expectations during his readings and his willingness, at least to some degree, to shape (or be shaped by) their reception. When Stanley aggressively reads Frost's poems as poems on religious subjects—an interpretive move Frost frequently criticizes and carefully manages, even at the studios of NBC—Frost appears to go along, if reluctantly. Yet without an interviewer to frame reception, Frost often takes on that role himself, and the results can be similarly forceful in their framing effects.

The final point I'll make concerns Frost's use of commentary and sequence in readings. He experiments with sequences of poems that rely on a governing logic to connect them in conceptual terms, as well as to frame these sequences with narrative connectives and asides, to make emendations on the fly, to test out new possibilities for lyrics and longer narrative works beyond those achieved in their print incarnations. Reshuffling the sequence of poems, Frost riffs in the equivalent of jazz sets, stringing poems together in habitual but consistently revised patterns, and plays against the humanist impulse to locate speaker and poem in a simultaneity of authenticity. In live readings, the lyric is free to move and slide in new ways that challenge the very notion of "bounded" lyric form; it pluralizes the poems, framing them in relation to various contexts that open new interpretive possibilities.[10] Live performance provides novel possibilities of presence; the read text shivers ontologically, caught between pure lyric expression and Frost's articulation of it. Significantly, this effect entirely evaporates on a recording like the Caedmon album, which includes clips from different readings rather than an entire program, or the Random House *Voice of the Poet* series recording, which includes a mix of live and studio excerpts. These audio texts leave a flat, documentary impression, more like a newscaster reciting script than poet voicing poems, and don't capture the drama of sequence and comment Frost often achieves through the extension, compression, and bridging between aural ellipses.

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Indeed, Frost's commentary and directives before, during, and after a poem can be forceful in creating and restricting meaning. At a reading for the Chesapeake chapter of the American Studies association given March 31, 1959, Frost opens his talk by positioning himself between "science" and "witchcraft," calling himself (by this point I hope unsurprisingly) a "humanist" who mediates between the two. "I often talk about witches, I've known so many," he says. "Some scientist wants to come down and give me a scientific explanation of witches," he goes on, but, conjuring *Hamlet*, explains that one doesn't have to be a partisan of either "science" or "witchcraft" to entertain either: "so I have heard, and do in part believe it." In short, Frost prepares his audience to think of him, during this reading, as a moderator between two worldviews, and so when he makes reference to this position of shared meaning throughout the reading, poems that might appear surrounded only by white space on the page are reframed.

Frost often underscores these framing devices quite deliberately, playing them off against the lyrics. This occurs during two readings of "Never Again Would Birds' Song Be the Same," a poem that inscribes voice and sound as its subject. In the Chesapeake reading, after reading the poem, Frost adds, "you see that's modern science, that's crossing things." In the context of this comment the poem might be read as a critique of scientific rationalism, personified as Eve/woman, a reading that offsets a variety of possible interpretations of the poem and shapes its reception quite intentionally as "about science," a possibility hardly suggested in the poem's diction. So in the Chesapeake reading, "Birds' Song" functions as a lament over the encroachment of scientific rationalism on a pastoral, romanticized American landscape: Eve's "eloquence so soft" appears as an insinuating faculty of deception that masquerades as "laughter," but bears sinister implications, and "never again" sounds less like a prediction than a lament. The line "she was in their song" loses its ambiguity in this new context to suggest a probability that the prediction of "never again" is really a lament. The Chesapeake reading thus suppresses a reading like Richard Poirier's, which explicitly inscribes the voice of Eve as the figure of a "sentence sound" (130) in the text. Readings like Poirier's might seem particularly important to enforce in an actual performance of the poem since they regard the originary voice—Eve's and, by implication, Frost's—as enduringly productive. It is an odd association for Frost to abjure. Readings show how these poems sound Orphically, at once embodied presentations that cite the poem's identity, and cautious swerves from it.[11]

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Encore

Frost's performances capture the way his poems' willed essences clash with embodied presences. Sighing repatriates a lyric to its land of creation, only for it to be exiled moments later through tumbledown; a poem gets framed and reframed. Sometimes, Frost sequences his shorter lyrics to produce this jarring pattern, as in a reading marked in the Woodberry archive simply as "1955," where he explains:

> Now I'm going to read to you, chiefly, and I'd like to say that in the middle of the afternoon like this I suppose that one emotion ought to be enough for the, for the, for the hour. I'm going to just show you three, four or five emotions in rapid succession, three or four different kinds of poems. And they're, you'll see if I can mix them right out of my head for you, mix them. First, two or three little ones that make a group of one, just one emotion.

He begins with "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" and moves so quickly into "The Road Not Taken" that the break is hardly perceptible, though at points he sighs various words in his typical manner, with phrases like "I shall be telling this" heavily retarded and almost treacley in implied significance. He launches into "Come In" with tumbledown speed, but then calmly intones it, as if comfortable at last in the portion of his "emotional" sequence that allows for new possibilities and unfamiliar phrases. The poems come all in a rush, tripping each others' heels. There is an urgency to the pacing, and often the flipping of pages and mumbles of consideration can be heard in between, adding to the note of spontaneity and improvisation.

This tension between Frost's self-presentation as a stalwart performer of his own voice and the way he undermines that voice at the lectern make his readings particularly fruitful sites. By posing basic questions about Robert Frost's taped poetry readings and what purposes readings served him, I've tried also to broach the problem of the audio archive. For this is still open terrain in modernist studies. Perhaps one question that lies there should be, are these important texts to be recovered with the same care and attention that have over recent decades been paid to original sources for poems in print? Or are they properly considered ephemera, to be pored over by the curious, but left to their eventual disintegration? As the Victorianist John Picker points out, these recording have long been "ignored or held in contempt as irrelevant by most traditional scholars

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of print poetry" (645). In the case of Frost, the poetry reading, even in the mere act of sequencing a few short poems for an afternoon crowd, demonstrates how performance can shift authority from the poem's ineffability to the close air in an oak-paneled room, then back again. In Frost's readings, the tension between freshness of poetic sound—and the sounds of re-sounding—make themselves powerfully heard.

§

I would like to thank Justine Salton, Derek Furr, Andrea Scott, Kristin Dombek, and Tracy K. Smith for their helpful comments on this essay. I also owe an enormous debt to the extraordinarily sharp comments by Marit MacArthur, the reviewer for *Twentieth-Century Literature*.

Notes

1. Monteiro cites a *New York Times* review of Frost's 1962 book *In the Clearing*, revealing just how plain this link was to most readers: "Old-stone savage or new-power-hungry savage . . . the good-fences-make-good-neighbors philosophy is riddled again in Berlin" (*Politics* 236).

2. Some tapes contained specific information regarding date, audience, and/or event—e.g., "Robert Frost Reading His Poems for a Joint Meeting of the Chesapeake Chapter of the American Studies Association, March 31 1959"—while others offered almost nothing—e.g., "Robert Frost 1955." I also make reference to some of Frost's commercially available recordings, though they're of less concern in this essay, which takes as its focus live encounters. When possible, I've tried to suggest how Frost may have been responding to particularities of his audience or historical contexts, though some times this has been difficult to do.

3. For a full discussion of Antin's method see my "David Antin's Pragmatist Technophobia." Michael Davison offers another such example in his description of Paul Blackburn's use of the tape recorder as a "dimension of his material text" (107).

4. Two recent books do begin to address modernist poets more fully: Lesley Wheeler's *Voicing American Poetry* (2008), which includes chapters on Edna St. Vincent Millay and Langston Hughes; and Derek Furr's *Recorded Poetry and Poetic Reception from Edna Millay to the Circle of Robert Lowell* (2010).

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5. While there is no major critical literature that theorizes Frost's voice, it is common to make mention of it. Two of Frost's biographers, Lawrance Thompson and Jay Parini, often describe Frost's readings, and Evans and Newdick comment on Frost's reading persona and performance. Numerous monographs mention asides at readings, though none take up the subject of the readings themselves. Beyond the recordings at Harvard and the LOC, many of Frost's readings are preserved on audiotape. Frost held posts of Consultant in poetry and the humanities to the Library of Congress from 1958 to 1963, which means many of his late readings, press conferences, and speeches at festivals and celebratory dinners were recorded and are now housed there. Frost also made three studio recordings for the Archive of Recorded Poetry and Literature at Library of Congress, in 1948, 1953, and 1959. The LOC holds recordings of public readings Frost gave there as well, including speeches at dinners and press conferences held after his trip to the USSR. Furthermore, Frost's association with a number of educational institutions—including Harvard University, Amherst College, the University of Michigan, Middlebury College (through Bread Loaf), and Dartmouth College—led to his poetry being recorded even more. And not all Frost's recordings are archival: Frost pressed his own Caedmon vinyl, *Robert Frost in Recital,* in 1976 and today his work enjoys representation on CD, though online clips are limited to affiliates of the academic institutions that make them digitally accessible.

6. While Frost does share a number of elements with platform poet-performers like Lindsay and Riley—he is folksy, entertaining, comfortably bucolic, and anecdotal, and he exploits reading for financial gain—the "actual" speaking voices of poets like Lindsay and Riley betray a different set of reading conventions than Frost's. Lindsay's reading voice is a highly affected, trilling rococo, especially when reading poems like "The Congo," when he mock-chants lines like "never again will we hoodoo you," and throughout his performance he howls, screeches, and modulates between at least two octaves. A rare 1911 recording of Riley reading "Knee-Deep in June" reveals a striking resemblance to Frost's typical reading of "The Witch of Coös," in which Frost impersonates the Mother and Son of that poem by emphasizing their sharp New England accents (as will be discussed), but where Riley seems to take the voice of a country farmer on as his own in a sort of full-character impersonation, Frost maintains his own difference as a speaker, clearly distinct from the "characters" he imitates. One might say, then, the platform poets embody their subjects where Frost represents them.

7. Yopi Prins has made a similar argument about Victorian poetry in general which, as she says, "circulated as 'acoustic devices' for the mediation of voice,

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preceding and perhaps even predicting the sound reproduction technologies that emerged in the course of the nineteenth century" (44).

8. It should be stressed that "humanism" as I'm using it is distinct from the term's use during Frost's lifetime, especially as popularized by the work of the conservative cultural and literary critic Irving Babbitt. Indeed, Frost was so displeased by his friend Gorham Munson's association of himself with Babbitt's "New Humanism" in his 1927 book *Robert Frost: A Study in Sensibility and Good Sense* (and then again later in his 1930 article "Robert Frost and the Humanist Temper") that it caused a permanent rift in their friendship. Babbitt's humanism was an assault on the legacy of Romanticism, and particularly the work of Rousseau as described in *Rousseau and Romanticism* (1919). Babbitt argued that modern culture post-Rousseau was a "struggle between the general sense and the sense of the individual" (10), and that the weight of the latter was perilously tipping the scales. Romanticism, Babbitt argued, had ushered in self-gratifying "imaginative unrestraint" (14) and he called for a return to a "classicism" of "nature, imitation, probability and decorum" (17). In the process of this polemic, Babbitt critiqued the Christian emphasis on heavenly rewards as well as the interior psychology of Frost's erstwhile intellectual mentor, William James. For these reasons alone, Frost had no interest in being part of Babbitt's company. For more on the Babbitt/Munson controversy, see Thompson, *Triumph*, 323-27.

9. There are, to be sure, numerous other poems in which Frost regularly retards his reading pace near the end, including "Two Tramps in Mud Time," "A Soldier," and "A Tuft of Flowers."

10. Similarly, Sharon Cameron's examination of textually faithful fascicle versions of Dickinson's poems reveals them not as hermetically sealed but as deeply embedded in context: "I mean to ask how reading the lyric in sequence is different from reading the lyric as independent, for to do the latter is to suppress the context and the relations that govern the lyric in context—a suppression generating that understanding of Dickinson's poems as enigmatic, isolated, culturally incomprehensible phenomena" (19). Charles Bernstein has made the link between such a textualist claim and readings themselves: "The poem, viewed in terms of its multiple performances, or mutual intertranslatability, has a fundamentally plural existence" (9).

11. It should be mentioned that Tyler Hoffman, Matthew Fike, and others have pointed to the common assumption that Frost wrote "Birds' Song" as a dedication to his assistant and lover Kay Morrison, but the reference would hardly

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be available to non-intimates at the time, turning the nominal poem on sentence sounds into a oblique and private concern. At the Coolidge Auditorium reading discussed above, Frost plunges into biography. After a reading of "A Soldier," Frost introduces "Birds' Song" by saying merely, "this is in praise of a lady." Listeners to this reading are directed to regard it as a poem in praise of "a lady," presumably Eve or a code for a private allusion, whose singing is now represented as some beneficent balm ("in praise of") in accord with rather than antagonistic to the birdsong. Whatever the particulars of either reading, it seems clear that Frost's comments organize contrasting interpretive frames.

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Against Things: The At-Home Objects of Marianne Moore

Robert Volpicelli

From 1965 until her death in 1972, Marianne Moore lived at 35 West Ninth Street in Greenwich Village. Moore's Greenwich Village apartment brimmed with all sorts of interesting items: autographed baseballs, hand-carved elephants, and Venetian glass jockeyed for space atop her bookshelves, coffee table, and mantelpiece. Crowded among such ornaments, any visitor to Moore's living room would have immediately recognized her affection for objects. Hildegarde Lasell Watson—Moore's longtime friend and wife of Dr. James Sibley Watson, Jr., the co-owner of *The Dial*—even imagined Moore's home as a "retreat" from human interaction into the solitude of the object world. Watson once wrote of the poet's "long dim apartment":

> Nowhere else are so many varied small replicas of animals in every material, wood, silver, bronze, an ivory muslin elephant by Malvina Hoffman, a silver rat with carnelian, E. E. Cummings's painting hangs on the door of an exquisite yellow rose—A small crystal chandelier catches the light. I never knew anywhere rooms of such remoteness.[1] (IV.1)

But where Watson emphasized the isolation of a life lived among inanimate objects, Moore relished the company of her curios and attributed great significance to the stuff with which she intimately shared her home. In 1969, Moore paid explicit tribute to her trinkets by bequeathing all of her apartment's contents to the Rosenbach Museum & Library, which had purchased her personal and literary papers the previous year. Her bequest authorized the Rosenbach to recreate and display a "Marianne C. Moore Room" on the museum's premises using the exact same arrangements and

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specifications as her original apartment.[2] In preserving these personal effects alongside her letters and manuscripts, Moore positioned her objects to be read as an integral part of her literary archive. A monument to her lifelong interest in odds and ends, Moore's Rosenbach room—as cluttered and remote as it was when Watson saw it many years earlier—still encourages visitors to consider how physical objects are intricately woven into her poetry as well as into the history of her poetic production.

The value that Moore placed on her knickknacks speaks loudly to her full participation in what Douglas Mao calls "the age of the object" (6). In other words, Moore joins those modernists who "introduced into their writings a self-conscious contemplating of the object *qua* object hitherto only sporadically anticipated" (13). Among a small but devoted circle of critics, Moore's love of "solid objects" has not gone unnoticed. Linda Leavell, for instance, touches upon the subject in her study of Moore's relation to twentieth-century visual arts. Explicating Moore's use of collage, Leavell suggests that Moore's poems operated as living-roomlike spaces in which she arranged her favorite objects (4). More recently, however, critics have turned from Moore's frequent engagements with modern art to her many interactions with consumer culture. From her days as a student at Bryn Mawr, Moore proved ever attentive to how people used material possessions as a means of configuring their identities.[3] Not surprisingly, her interest in this sort of self-fashioning extended beyond clothing to the objects that constituted, as the title of her 1922 poem announces, "People's Surroundings." As Moore developed as a poet, she grew particularly conscious of the ways she could identify herself through objects, such as her extensive collection of animal figurines.[4] But apparently Moore did not need to own an object to perceive its influence. As Victoria Bazin explains, Moore took much from a modern culture of window-shopping, the kind of "just looking" that defined not only the displays of department stores but also those of museums and art galleries. In these locations, she argues, viewers regularly came across juxtapositions of familiar and foreign items that effectively collapsed the exotic into everyday life. Department-store windows and museum halls contained a phantasmagoria of fascinating objects that, after traveling great distances, seemed to come out of nowhere (10). According to Bazin, Moore appropriated the disorienting and fragmentary nature of this world of out-of-place objects for her poetry. Like a collector who detaches objects from

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their time and place, she constructed her poems out of a miscellany of displaced materials in an effort to redeem the "cultural clutter or debris of modernity" (1).

An eclectic mixture of objects, the archive Moore left to the Rosenbach initially evokes this sense of "cultural clutter." Indeed, Moore's living room exhibit acts as a site of convergence for a host of divergent material cultures.[5] Within this small room, objects meet across time (a nineteenth-century settee sits adjacent to a modern coffee table), bridge great distances (a Samoan wooden bowl looks out at the desk Moore bought for her Bryn Mawr dormitory), and contrast in style (a sentimental photograph of Moore's grandparents hangs next to Cummings's abstract "rose" painting). In these ways, Moore's Rosenbach collection does appear to take its cues from a consumer culture that indiscriminately separates objects from their origins. And yet, a desire for "miscellany" does not fully account for Moore's preservation of her living room: the poet's archiving of her own home is not so much a sign of the fragmented and disorienting aesthetic critics often ascribe to Moore's work as it is an indication of her attempt to maintain a sense of situatedness. By bequeathing all of her apartment's trimmings and trappings to the Rosenbach, Moore reveals her intent to keep her objects grouped in a single location. Moreover, the household items in Moore's exhibit, far from simply representing the detached objects of modernity, retain a rather distinct connection to their place within her life. Gesturing at the wholeness of a complete domestic scene rather than the fractured detritus of the modern world, Moore's living room exhibit establishes a permanent home for her material belongings. Since these bits and pieces collectively help constitute Moore's unique identity, separating them, or removing them from this context, would threaten her sense of self. Accordingly, when visitors come upon Moore's living room, they do not find out-of-place pieces cordoned off in display cases or locked away like sterilized artifacts. Instead, they meet Moore's objects very much "at home": sustaining what were their coordinates in Moore's day-to-day life, these objects peek out from behind picture frames and congregate along the congested mantelpiece.

Upon closer examination, then, Moore's interests extended to both the locationless objects of consumer culture and to those objects comfortably nestled at home. But while the splintered images of Moore's collage work reside neatly within the framework of familiar narratives about modernism, the homier, more domestic side of her poetry still proves dif-

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ficult for critics to process.[6] This continued illegibility of Moore's at-home objects comes as no surprise given modernist studies' recent interest in the uncanniness, or *unhomeliness*, of "things." For Bill Brown, the distinction between objects and "things" has much to do with a material entity's location. Under his rubric, objects denote the "epistemologically or phenomenological understood" ("Secret" 2), the common materials a subject can easily place as a part of routine experience. "Things," on the other hand, stand for the discursively unknown, those indeterminate physical phenomena that leap from their usual places or no longer fit into their usual schemes. Pried from their locations in "the familiar object world," "things," by virtue of their sheer unpredictability, appear to take on lives of their own (6). As Brown argues, a subject can induce the lively qualities of a "thing" by dislocating an object from "the circuits through which it is what it typically is" (2). Objects are known by their function, so the "misuse" of an object disrupts the semantic patterns by which we understand the material world. The outcome of such a dislocation is that it allows for an object (now a "thing") to be newly encountered with a heightened sense of attention to its "thingliness," the details previously covered over by habit and familiarity. These sensual details captivate the subject, who is drawn into a fetishistic relationship that imbues the "thing" with a certain power because of its newfound aesthetic appeal and intriguingly dynamic traits. The process of converting an object into a "thing," Brown adds, helps to describe the methods of an avant-garde artist like Marcel Duchamp, whose art depended on the use of ready-made objects, usually mass-produced tools. Duchamp's *Fountain*—the porcelain urinal he tried to enter into the Armory Show of 1917—exemplifies the "modernist capacity" to detach objects from their ordinary places and functions in order to expose the unfamiliar "things" lurking beneath everyday experience (*Sense* 78).

From the beginning of her poetic career, Moore is aware of how dislocating objects from their particular locations, cultural milieus, and functions renders them new and fascinating things. In fact, many of her early poems illustrate the way dislocated objects can absorb one's aesthetic attention to the point of becoming almost hypnotizing. Yet, even at this early stage, Moore is wary of the strange powers of things and cautious about the costs involved in producing art via a strategy of dislocation. And in her later work, she takes this initial uneasiness and more clearly reconceives of artistic displacement as an oppressive act to be resisted. Instead

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ficult for critics to process.[6] This continued illegibility of Moore's at-home objects comes as no surprise given modernist studies' recent interest in the uncanniness, or *unhomeliness*, of "things." For Bill Brown, the distinction between objects and "things" has much to do with a material entity's location. Under his rubric, objects denote the "epistemologically or phenomenological understood" ("Secret" 2), the common materials a subject can easily place as a part of routine experience. "Things," on the other hand, stand for the discursively unknown, those indeterminate physical phenomena that leap from their usual places or no longer fit into their usual schemes. Pried from their locations in "the familiar object world," "things," by virtue of their sheer unpredictability, appear to take on lives of their own (6). As Brown argues, a subject can induce the lively qualities of a "thing" by dislocating an object from "the circuits through which it is what it typically is" (2). Objects are known by their function, so the "misuse" of an object disrupts the semantic patterns by which we understand the material world. The outcome of such a dislocation is that it allows for an object (now a "thing") to be newly encountered with a heightened sense of attention to its "thingliness," the details previously covered over by habit and familiarity. These sensual details captivate the subject, who is drawn into a fetishistic relationship that imbues the "thing" with a certain power because of its newfound aesthetic appeal and intriguingly dynamic traits. The process of converting an object into a "thing," Brown adds, helps to describe the methods of an avant-garde artist like Marcel Duchamp, whose art depended on the use of ready-made objects, usually mass-produced tools. Duchamp's *Fountain*—the porcelain urinal he tried to enter into the Armory Show of 1917—exemplifies the "modernist capacity" to detach objects from their ordinary places and functions in order to expose the unfamiliar "things" lurking beneath everyday experience (*Sense* 78).

From the beginning of her poetic career, Moore is aware of how dislocating objects from their particular locations, cultural milieus, and functions renders them new and fascinating things. In fact, many of her early poems illustrate the way dislocated objects can absorb one's aesthetic attention to the point of becoming almost hypnotizing. Yet, even at this early stage, Moore is wary of the strange powers of things and cautious about the costs involved in producing art via a strategy of dislocation. And in her later work, she takes this initial uneasiness and more clearly reconceives of artistic displacement as an oppressive act to be resisted. Instead

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of defamiliarizing the objects around her into things, Moore turns to reconnecting with their familiar side. This transformation becomes most evident in Moore's poems of the late 1930s and 40s. In response to World War II, its dislocation of entire communities, and its transformation of humans into fungible objects for the purposes of warfare, Moore develops a new approach, a poetics of re-placement that endeavors to put "things" back into their contexts. She opts, in other words, to portray at-home objects, such as those residing within her living room exhibit, rather than unhomely "things," like Duchamp's *Fountain*. During this mature phase of her career, Moore no doubt recognizes the idealism—even romanticism—involved in her ambition of reuniting displaced objects with their origins. Nevertheless, she continues to labor toward a modernist poetry committed to familiarity rather than fragmentation, domesticity rather than dislocation.

The talismanic thing

First appearing in Bryn Mawr's alumnae magazine, *The Lantern*, in 1912, "A Talisman" stands not only as one of Moore's earliest forays into the world of published poetry, but also as one of her earliest efforts to think about the nature of things.[7] Compact and tightly rhymed—itself a kind of hard-edged gem, formally speaking—this poem considers a truly marvelous thing in the titular talisman:

I.
Upon a splintered mast,
Torn from the ship, and cast
Near her hull,

II.
A stumbling shepherd found,
Embedded in the ground
A sea gull

III.
Of lapis lazuli;
A scarab of the sea,
With wings spread,

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IV.
Curling its coral feet,
Parting its beak to greet,
Men long dead.

(171)

A mysterious and mystical idol valued above other materials with a purely utilitarian function, the talisman's value as a spirit-infused item typically warrants its adornment with lavish aesthetic details. The key to understanding the talisman in Moore's poem, however, comes in the third stanza, in which the speaker describes the seagull as a nautical version of a "scarab," or desert beetle. As Francis Griffith's entry in the 1911 *Encyclopedia Britannica* explains—and as Moore, the astute collector, was most likely aware—the Egyptian hieroglyphic of a scarab doubled as the written sign for the verb "'become' and perhaps 'create,' and also the substantive 'phenomenon' or 'marvel.'" In labeling her talisman a "scarab," Moore thus anticipates the process by which an object *becomes* a thing, a phenomenon or marvel of the physical world. Griffith also says that the scarab, across many different historical epochs, signified a "good omen" and "friendly wishes." It is as a harbinger of good luck, then, that the talisman in Moore's poem—sculpted in the form of a seagull, a bird whose presence told sailors they were close to safely ending their journey—found its place onboard a ship. This particular talisman, though, refuses to play a part in such a symbolic universe: instead of providing fortune and fame on the high seas, it brings only the tragedy of a shipwreck. Depicting this failure of the fetish, Moore's "A Talisman" becomes a cautionary tale about putting stock in, and marveling over, objects that lack function.

Broken up into four progressive segments, Moore's poem re-enacts the dangers involved in creating a talismanic thing. Such a process, as Brown suggests, often begins with detaching an object from the functions and contexts that make it appear familiar. Admittedly, a talisman is an object already estranged from the idea of function; yet the first two stanzas of Moore's poem portray what happens when the talisman is displaced even further from its original context. With directional markers like "Upon" and "Near," the poem's first lines immediately declare a concern with the talisman's location. But the location of this object is, in all actuality, a *dislocation*: as a result of the shipwreck, the talisman has been

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"Torn from the ship, and cast" away from its original situation onboard. Starting out with this tearing and casting away, Moore arrests the seagull in a state of detachment at the same time as she marks something of the violence inherent in dislocation. Indeed, Moore saturates the opening scene of "A Talisman" with the jarring, destructive force that has thrown the talisman from its place. Sifting through the wreckage of section I, the speaker encounters a "splintered mast" and a "hull" that hangs off the end of the first stanza as if detached from the rest of the ship.

The second stanza registers the impact of this disastrous wreck more fully. After the crash, the seagull now finds itself in a new and strange location, "Embedded in the ground." While this entrenchment in the earth no doubt contrasts with a gull's lofty habitat, it is this new out-of-placeness that allows for the talisman's transformation from a meaningless relic into a remarkable thing. According to Brown's logic, a thing in an unusual setting tends to disrupt a subject's normal perception of the object world, and Moore's talisman confounds and reverses the way animate subjects usually interact with inanimate objects: normally, humans confront inert materials, but in Moore's poem it is the thingly talisman that confronts the unsuspecting shepherd by "stumbling" him up. The second stanza of "A Talisman" thus exemplifies the way dislocation enables objects to command attention. Once this incongruous item announces its presence, it draws the speaker further into a thingly encounter. That is, as a bump in the shepherd's road, Moore's talisman breaks this subject out of the sensory-dampening grooves of habitual action and attunes him to the fascinating thing that lies directly underneath his feet.

The second half of Moore's poem takes on the perspective of the shepherd who picks up and examines the strangely captivating thing—a kind of found object—over which he has just tripped. Although Moore limits each stanza of her poem to what seems like the minimal amount of words necessary to construct her images, the third stanza is exceptional for the extent of information it offers about the physical presence of the talisman: "Of lapis lazuli / A scarab of the sea / With wings spread." In this moment, the speaker explores the talisman's exterior, becoming engrossed in its tactile quality. Turning first to its material substance, the speaker finds that the talisman is made of "lapis lazuli," a particularly striking smooth stone of a marbled blue hue. Its visual and textural qualities, reminiscent of an undulating sea, inform the image of the sea scarab that follows. Recasting this seagull as a "scarab" points, once again, to the talisman's

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magical, shape-shifting powers; however, in flirting with the possibility of seeing this object as a metaphor, such alteration threatens to overshadow the physical presence of the thing-at-hand.[8] But the following line of the poem—"With wings spread"—refuses to deviate from the course set out at the stanza's beginning and quickly returns to the tangible shape of the thing: the physical sharpness of the seagull's outspread wings contrasts intriguingly with the lapis's soft feel. Attuning the observer to these sensory details, Moore's talisman epitomizes how an undisclosed object (once hidden in the ground) can apotheosize into a fully aestheticized thing, eschewing abstract metaphor in favor of hypnotizing surfaces.

In the final stanza of "A Talisman," attention to the material textures of the thing produces a sense that it is alive. For Brown, the economic understanding of a commodity fetish—Marx borrows the term "fetish" from classical anthropology to describe the abstract social values that inhere in desirable goods—falls short of capturing the uncanny way things often appear to come to life. To account for this dynamism, Brown argues for the existence of a "more pedestrian, not to say less powerful" type of fetishization in which "objects captivate us, fascinate us, compel us to have a relation with them" (*Sense* 29). With this sort of fetishism, the "mesmeric power" of an aestheticized thing is so intense that a viewer supplies the inanimate object with a certain vitality or personality (33). In much the same way, after locating the aesthetic value of the talisman, Moore's poem has the once inert object reveal its secret life: "Curling its coral feet, / Parting its beak to greet / Men long dead." As the transfixing talisman starts to move, the jolts of consonance in this stanza's first line—"Curling" and "coral"—mimic the jerky movements of the talisman as it wakes from a long slumber. As it is clenching its feet the bird is also "Parting its beak to greet," a particularly significant action, as the bird's "parting" mouth suggests the power of speech. Graduating from simple movements to more complex signs of consciousness, Moore's talisman upsets the dichotomies that separate subjects from objects, disrupting the presumption that humans have the power to control supposedly lifeless matter. Encroaching upon the terrain of subjectivity, the thing in Moore's poem stares back at the shepherd, preparing to "greet" him with an uncanny resemblance of his own humanity.

"A Talisman" starts by evoking the larger landscape in which the object is embedded, but the last two stanzas move toward an isolated stare that captures only the thing-in-itself. Moore's talisman, in other words,

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successfully fills the speaker's vision, rendering it impossible to consider any context that exists outside the thing. As the allure of this talismanic thing takes over Moore's poem, then, it eclipses the lives of the humans around it. In the last line—"Men long dead"—the implosion of poetic vision wrought by this thing appears to cancel the possibility of human life altogether. The shepherd is utterly absent by the poem's conclusion: the talisman's charm, it seems, entirely erases him from view. Yet the final line also works to complicate the ascendency of this thing. As "Men long dead" conjures up images of the shipwrecked crew, traces of the talisman's past emerge. While the spatial focus narrows, this temporal zooming out insinuates that the context of a thing never wholly dissipates; remnants of its history remain even after it has been displaced, and the ghostly origins of Moore's talisman linger on, haunting whoever would further dislocate it. Such an eerie ending marks Moore's ambivalence about her poem constituting a place for things and an apparatus of detachment. Concluding with the spectral presence of these shipwrecked subjects—past victims of the talisman—Moore's poem intimates the cost of fixating on the powers of things, a cost she reckons with in her later poetry.

"What a fine thing!"

As Moore develops in her appreciation of objects, she realizes that complete dislocation is not only untenable—context will always, as at the end of "A Talisman," creep back into the picture—but that it is also unethical. Ultimately, this alteration in Moore's thinking has much to do with the political climate of the 1930s and 40s. For Charles Berger, many of Moore's poems from this period take aim at the "pernicious ideologies of nationalism and hero-worship" (151) that pervaded the years leading up to the Second World War. The critical skepticism and rigorous wit of her poetry, Berger argues, countered the will to mastery "celebrated by fascists and non-fascist sympathizers" (156). During this same period, Moore also grew intensely opposed to a sort of fascism of the fabricated world, the sense of human mastery that encouraged artists to capriciously displace objects for their own aesthetic pleasure. Intimately intertwined with both her politics and poetics, Moore's refined distaste for making art out of things governs the structure of her 1944 poem, "A Carriage From Sweden." She devotes the first half of this poem to assessing more closely the deleterious consequences of staging "thingly" encounters. Replaying

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the aesthetic experience of "A Talisman," the speaker of "A Carriage From Sweden" initially marvels over the characteristics of a displaced thing, the eponymous Swedish carriage. Moore adopts such an artistic strategy, though, only to expose its inevitable destructiveness. Her poem in effect illumines a parallel between artistic dislocations and the displacement and diaspora engendered by the fascist culture of her day. The portrait of a "fine thing" that Moore's poem offers, then, is a manifestly ironic one. Painfully aware of the implications of poeticizing displacement, "A Carriage From Sweden" fosters the sense that, behind each fascinating and lively thing, there lies an insular and deadly kind of looking.

"A Carriage From Sweden" opens in the Brooklyn Museum. Encountering a carriage in one of the museum's displays, the speaker quickly begins to muse upon the differences between this object's origin and its present location:

> They say there is a sweeter air
> where it was made, than we have here;
> a Hamlet's castle atmosphere.
> At all events there is in Brooklyn
> something that makes me feel at home.
>
> No one may see this put-away
> museum-piece, this country cart
> that inner happiness made art;
> and yet, in this city of freckled
> integrity it is a vein
>
> of resined straightness from north-wind
> hardened Sweden's once-opposed-to-
> compromise archipelago
> of rocks. Washington and Gustavus
> Adolphus, forgive our decay.
>
> (131)

That Moore initially sets her poem in a museum gallery is significant, as the spatial topos of a museum supplies the poem with competing notions of nearness and farness, the domestic and the foreign. Museums bring the remote into close proximity but also transpose the proximate onto the remote, and the poem commences with a call to the eternally elsewhere,

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a "sweeter air" that is always missing from what "we have here." Succumbing to this seductive reverie, the speaker imagines a far-off and fanciful location with "a Hamlet's castle atmosphere." Her selecting a fictionalized place over any real location the cart might have come from hints at her clouded perception of this object. From the outset, then, Moore's poem promotes caution with respect to the fantasies that her speaker constructs around the cart. The speaker claims to find "something" that makes her "feel at home," but searching for a feeling of homeliness in a museum is a strikingly peculiar endeavor, insofar as museums normally are devoted to exhibiting the foreign and the unfamiliar. The first stanza sets up a tension, then, between the institutional praxis of museums and the speaker's search for objects of belonging. Establishing this conflict, the beginning of the poem suggests that certain objects can make one feel "at home"—though these are perhaps not the "things" that one would find in a museum.

Little concerned with generating familiar feelings, museums charge mundane objects with the kind of captivating aesthetic that turns them into enthralling "things." In the second stanza, Moore's museumgoer picks up on this process and exposes how dislocating an object in a museum alters the way she perceives it. Once the speaker recognizes the "country cart" as a "museum-piece," she then instantly envisions this formerly modest object as "inner happiness made art." This aesthetic sensation, signaling the cart's "thingly" metamorphosis, derives in part from the fact that this out-of-place artifact comes from a far-off location that excites the speaker's imagination. But her satisfaction in this instance also reflects the way this displaced thing disturbs its new environment. The antiquated essence of the country cart evokes a simplicity, a "resined straightness," that runs counter to the "freckled / integrity" of the modern city. The third stanza thus ends in the hope that the solidness of a cart that comes from an appropriately rocky and "hardened" Sweden can stave off the "decay" of an overwrought civilization. Becoming lost in this artifact's primitive appeal, the speaker temporarily escapes the tribulations of modernity, and the uncompromising cart prompts her fantasy about the return of a "golden age" symbolized by "Washington" and "Gustavus Adolphus."[9] At the same time, however, the poem marks suspicions about such a fantastic escape. The speaker's extremely hard rhyming of "cart" and "art" makes her manifestation of "inner happiness" sound forced and oversimplified. In truth, the complications that attend to making a dislocated object into "art" lurk from the start of the second stanza. While "No one may see

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this put-away / museum-piece" means that visitors neglect the carriage as they busily view other, perhaps more exotic, exhibits, the notion of "not seeing" also recalls the way that museums, in encouraging fictions and fantasies about the things on display, actually obscure the objects they intend to represent. In this sense, "No one may see" this cart because viewers are looking at it all wrong, picturing something it is not—a piece of art.

In spite of the way "A Carriage From Sweden" folds back upon itself to warn of the delusions of dislocation, the mesmerizing effects of the museum temporarily win out. The fourth stanza becomes a sort of exhibit unto itself, a space of both displacing and displaying that facilitates the "thingly" fetishization of the carriage's intricate exterior:

> Seats, dashboard and sides of smooth gourd-
> rind texture, a flowered step, swan-
> dart brake, and swirling crustacean-
> tailed equine amphibious creatures
> that garnish the axel-tree! What
>
> a fine thing! What unannoying
> romance!
>
> (131)

Honing in on the material qualities of a dislocated thing, Moore's aesthetic converges with the curatorial practices of the museum. In doing so, her poem seemingly validates Bill Brown's claim that modernism grew out of the museum's propensity for exhibiting objects as "things" of "phenomenological fascination" (*Sense* 126). Describing the cart's "smooth gourd-rind texture," Moore's stanza dexterously records something of the phenomenological feel of this thing, and the host of animal images ("swan- / dart," "crustacean- / tailed equine amphibious") shoots the stanza through with a thingly vitality or dynamism. It is in the midst of this aesthetic excitement, however, that Moore launches a critique of the museum's modus operandi. Although the hyphens of this passage string together ornate and descriptive words, they also point to the cart's incompleteness in the way Moore's lines break over compound words, making each individual image appear free-floating and unfinished. As a series of unsynthesized pieces, the stanza's carriage resists cohering as an entire object: the speaker tears it apart at the seams. Such dismantling illustrates how a museum display not only detaches the cart from its par-

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ticular cultural milieu but also detaches the thing from itself.[10] Useful in understanding this kind of aesthetic dismemberment is Peter Schwenger's concept of "the murder of the thing" (104). For Schwenger, the defamiliarizing effects hold the potential to fracture objects "into planes 'not resembling' each other" (113). Such fragmented exhibits no doubt work to expose the constructedness of perception. Yet they nonetheless nullify the existence of the physical object, obscuring it with human modes of signification. Sharply attuned to the casualties involved in her poetic procedure, Moore inscribes the violence that results from aesthetic ecstasy into her poem: as the speaker exclaims "What // a fine thing!," Moore's stanza break severs the "fine thing" from the stanza that contains the rest of its parts.

The poem's allusions to historic events raises the stakes of the speaker's nullifying stare. It is significant, for example, that the cart originates from Sweden, one of the few European countries to remain neutral throughout most of the Second World War, but more importantly Sweden acted as a refuge for Europe's displaced Jews during the advent of the Holocaust. Sweden's role as an asylum is made explicit later in the poem, as the speaker remembers "Denmark's sanctuaried Jews!" who evaded Nazi persecution by fleeing to Sweden in 1943 (132). With such historical references, "A Carriage From Sweden" begs to be read as a WWII poem, though it generally hasn't been.[11] When critics do place the poem in its wartime context, they tend to separate the cart from the poem's politics.[12] Yet these historical events come to bear directly—and destructively—on Moore's carriage. Because, through its lingering origins, the displaced cart connects to the war's displaced Jews, the poem insists that the deconstruction of this thing cannot be taken lightly. The dissection of the cart, even if it appears merely aesthetic, all too gruesomely evokes the Nazi's brutal displacement of the Jewish people into concentration camps. Fractured, fragmented, disoriented—Moore critiques the various terms usually associated with modernism's approach to things by rearticulating them as a vocabulary of war violence: broken, torn apart, deracinated.

In transposing the inconceivable horrors of war onto a casual museum visit, Moore enlarges her meditation on the nature of dislocation. The speaker's aestheticizing gaze suggests how an isolating mode of seeing that registers an object only in parts can obscure the devastating actions taking place outside of its intense focus (culminating in the sort of insular vision that led some of Moore's modernist friends, most notably Ezra Pound, to

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fascist sympathies). But Moore does not merely present the cart as some kind of useful metaphor with which to represent the violence of war; rather she explores the day-to-day roots of systemic violence and modern conflict. In this thinking about the ethical implications of everyday actions, Moore here anticipates the work of philosopher Hannah Arendt. Arendt's writings on WWII attend to the ways in which traumas like the Holocaust, though monstrous, are not the work of a few monstrous individuals as much as they are the products of ubiquitous cultural attitudes.[13] Even before Arendt articulates a sense of a collective culpability, Moore gestures at the "banality" with which her culture perceives actions like dislocation and detachment. Identifying how such dislocations are performed without pause or prejudice—both in the museum and on the military front—she implies that our treatment of humans and objects is mutually informative. Put differently, the displacement of objects bespeaks a widely held disregard for particularity and difference, bolstering a pattern of domination across all categories of existence.

"Made in Sweden: carts are my trade"

Subject to the aggression of artistic dislocation, the fate of Moore's thing in "A Carriage From Sweden" appears bleak. Of the critics who have weighed in on this fated, Linda Leavell engages most with the physical presence of the cart as a central concern of the poem.[14] "The carriage provides an occasion for the Brooklyn poet to imagine the Sweden she describes in the rest of the poem" (133), she begins, but for her the real importance of the cart lies in the way that it allows Moore to voice her anxieties about the consequences of artistic representation. As the speaker's penchant for fictions and fantasies already indicate, artistic representations of an object tend to eclipse its existence with imagined images. Such a process, Leavell argues, constitutes the "unsolvable dilemma" of a poem like "A Carriage From Sweden": although Moore wants to release the cart from her gaze and "grant her thing its autonomy," by selecting it for her poem she has inevitably already "remade" it as a product of her own imagination. The kind of selecting Leavell describes—in diminishing, or perhaps even seeming to delete, the existence of the physical entity—speaks to the damage Moore's speaker wreaks in remaking the cart into "a fine thing!" And yet, the second half of "A Carriage From Sweden" suggests that Moore does not wholly consider the being of her cart a

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lost cause, or an "unsolvable dilemma." In response to the ontological violence of representation, Moore *un*selects the thing she earlier sought to raise into a piece of art. The speaker of her poem releases the cart from her aesthetic gaze and re-places the dislocated thing back in the refuge of Sweden—now a sort of aesthetic asylum—where it can shed its identity as a "museum-piece" and return to being an ordinary object, a "country cart" integrated within its context and function. With this shift, Moore declares her preference for the mundane realities of at-home objects and stakes out a new direction for her poetry.

Moore finds subtle means of distancing herself from, and ultimately subverting, the conventions that give rise to the cart's dislocation in the first half of "A Carriage From Sweden." After indulging in the textures of this thing, leaving the cart in a heap of pieces, the speaker deems her disassembly an "unannoying / romance." This at first might seem to indicate that the speaker will continue to take pleasure in the museum display of the dislocated thing, but once again a line break severs a connection, separating out "unnanoying" and leaving only "romance" in order to signal that the process of dislocation should prompt suspicion.[15] Skeptically, then, the rest of "A Carriage From Sweden" attempts to look past the "phenomenological fascination" of the museum—and does so, primarily, by looking to function. As Brown argues, artists tend to alienate objects from their functions, or use-values, in order to access their formerly unseen aesthetic values ("Secret" 3). Moore's poem appears to closely follow this procedure, detaching the cart from its function so as to heighten its artistic appearance. Significantly, however, her defamiliarized portrait retains traces of utility. Among the items listed in stanza four are "seats," "dashboards," and "brakes," instrumental parts that serve to break the kind of talismanic trance that obfuscates the carriage's purpose. In other words, rerouting this dislocated and deconstructed thing back into the circuits of use-value allows Moore to re-member, or piece together, the complete cart.

Moore's inscription of function extends well beyond the completeness of objects, though. The final piece the speaker lists in her exhibition of the cart is the "axle-tree," and this one component embodies something of Moore's new approach to objects. Crucial to the cart's operation, an axle-tree is "The fixed bar or beam of wood, etc., on the rounded ends of which the opposite wheels of a carriage revolve" (*OED*). Designated by a compound term, however, the piece at the center of Moore's cart is made up of seemingly opposed elements—the made and the organic, the functional and the aesthetic. These oppositions converge in what Leavell

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identifies as Moore's "functionalist aesthetic." Leavell glosses the functionalist aesthetic as a program in which "Architects—and later other artists—looked to nature for examples of form following function" (81) that they would then incorporate into their blueprints and designs. Continuing in this tradition, "A Carriage From Sweden" proposes that function, rather than setting artistic restrictions, can be aesthetically pleasing. Yet it is not that function merely equates to beauty. In addressing Moore's particular brand of beauty, Elisa New argues that she conceived of "beauty" as those moments in which individual parts align with a "more comprehensive economy" (116), or a greater sense of Creation. By furtively insisting on the aesthetics of instruments, "A Carriage From Sweden" suggests that Moore saw function as one possible means of arriving at this sense of an integrated totality. It is function, after all, that designates an object's location in relation to other objects (a hammer, say, is always paired with nails), providing the framework for mapping a comprehensive material network.[16] And it is with motioning toward this relationship between objects that Moore begins the process of pinpointing her cart's location in the wider object world.

As Moore's poem continues, it becomes clear that the location of an object involves more than a simple kind of geographical specificity. We see that, for Moore, it involves the complex matrix of relationships that envelope an object. Accordingly, the speaker reconstructs one of the cart's interactions:

> [. . .] And how beautiful, she
> with the natural stoop of the
> snowy egret, gray-eyed and straight-haired,
> for whom it should come to the door—
>
> of whom it reminds me. The split
> pine fair hair, steady gannet-clear
> eyes and the pine-needled-path deer-
> swift step; that is Sweden, land of the
> free and the soil for the spruce-tree—
>
> vertical through a seedling—all
> needles; from a green trunk, green shelf
> on shelf fanning out by itself.
>
> (131-32)

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Imagining the cart "com[ing] to the door" to pick up its "beautiful" rider, these stanzas of the poem develop the functional relationship hinted at previously. Although they might suggest that the object only operates for the sake of its human passengers, Moore once again destabilizes the subordination of objects to people—this time without the aid of dislocation. Establishing an ambiguity between subject and object, the speaker imagines *for whom* the cart functions, and she also thinks *of whom* it reminds her, partly associating the "she" of this stanza with the cart itself, endowing the object with a personality. This merging of subject and object here suggests how function renders people and material entities not only interdependent but also co-determinate: a carriage is not a carriage without a passenger and vice versa. Subsequently, the poem further complicates this subject-object relationship in attending to place. In the course of these stanzas, the "gray-eyed" passenger morphs into her place, as her "straight hair" becomes the "split / pine fair hair" of Sweden. With respect to the cart, a similar conversion occurs. Earlier, the speaker noticed the natural themes running throughout the cart's detailing; in this passage, the cart's arboreal aesthetic joins with the wooded scenes of Sweden, the home of "spruce-tree[s]" that are "vertical through a seedling" and "all / needles." In Sweden, then, subject and object cohere. Triangulating in this fashion among person, object, and place—among rider, cart, and Sweden—the poem unfolds "location" as a kind of relation-of-relations, truly involving an object, rather than tying it to a specific spot.

As the scene shifts, then, from the Brooklyn Museum to the Swedish countryside, "A Carriage From Sweden" moves from the uncontextualized to the utterly contextual. With this shift, Moore slides the out-of-place cart back into its original environment,[17] enacting her contextual epistemology, the idea that knowing an object requires experiencing it immersed in everyday use. In immersing the object in its backdrop, however, the speaker loses the sensuous presence of the thing she once spied in the museum. After returning the cart to Sweden, however, the poem does not mention it again, except in a final question that does not presume its presence. The camouflaged cart recalls another of Moore's WWII poems, "The Jerboa."[18] "The Jerboa" also opens with an appropriated object: "A Roman had an / artist, a freedman, / contrive a cone—pine-cone / or fir-cone—with holes for a fountain" (10). A "pine-cone / or fir-cone," the object can no longer be precisely recognized. The empires that "contrive" such appropriated objects in "The Jerboa" own an unsurprising affinity for dislocation. The Egyptians, for instance, collect animals from around

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the world—from "hippopotami" and "dappled-dog- / cats" to "dikdik" and "eagles"—and line them up in a kind of perverse parade. Moore's poem offers the jerboa as a foil to the decontextualized animals of empire. Tellingly, at first mention of this "sand-brown jumping-rat" (13), the speaker also labels the jerboa, "the untouched," an animal that remains in its habitat. This proper positioning is the necessary condition of the camouflaged state the jerboa then achieves, that is, the way "it honors the sand by assuming its color" (14). Reflecting the same principle of right placement, Moore's cart becomes concealed at the precise moment it finds a sense of belonging, which covers the object over with familiarity.

Submerged in its landscape, the cart appears as just one more object in a much larger material mise-en-scène. Thus as the cart recedes from view, a host of other objects enter the poem's field of vision: "The puzzle-jugs and hand-spun rugs, / the root-legged kracken shaped like dogs, / the hanging buttons and the frogs / that edge the Sunday jackets!" (132). At first, this passage evokes a kind of anthropological discourse: such a selection of handcrafted artifacts resembles the objects that might be collected under the label of "Sweden" at some museum. Catherine Paul has read other Moore poems in this way, arguing that they reflect the organizational shift in museums from taxonomic displays, in which "objects worthy of study are isolated from the copia that surrounded them" (164), to habitat groups, or "exhibits that combined species of flora and fauna such as one might find in nature" (165). The purpose of these habitat groups was to present "a more holistic view" of how "organisms appear in relation to other life-forms around them, thereby emphasizing life's function over its classification" (167). In spite of Paul's biological emphasis, it is tempting to retool her curatorial reading to account for a material context. Applying the notion of habitat groups to the ending of "A Carriage From Sweden" would produce a cart integrated into an ecosystem of interconnected objects, something like a diorama of Swedish folk culture. This reading would still place the cart in a museum—a more considerate museum perhaps, but a museum nonetheless. It would mistake the aim of the poem's final movement, in which the speaker does not collect objects so much as gather them to make up an unmistakably domestic atmosphere: this stanza, like the little room that a "stanza" is, overflows with games (the "puzzle-jug") and small animal miniatures (the "root-legged kracken shaped like dogs," which, in its mishapeness, evokes a child's making). At once, these many knickknacks recall Watson's portrait

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of Moore's New York apartment, where little animal figurines, such as this poem's "frog," huddled together over the hearth. Rather than being set apart from the viewer, as in the glass display of a museum, these objects constantly "edge" daily human experience like "buttons" that hang on "Sunday jackets." In furnishing this domestic scene, Moore's poem altogether undoes the unhomeliness of the museum to provide her objects with a sense of being-at-home.

At the poem's close, the speaker asks, "Sweden, / what makes the people dress that way / and those who see you wish to stay? / The runner, not too tired to run more / at the end of the race? And that / cart, dolphin graceful? A Dalèn / light-house, self lit?" (132). Such a question catalogues the cart among the people, customs, and other objects that share in its cultural coordinates, again emphasizing that these proximate relationships are what constitute the fold that is location. Moore's speaker ventures her own answer to this question: "I understand; / it's not pine-needle-paths that give spring / when they're run on, it's a Sweden / of moated white castles." Replacing "Hamlet's castle atmosphere" invoked in the first stanza of the poem with Sweden's "moated white castles," the speaker trades the fictional for the factual, the ethereal for the concrete. There remains, however, an air of idealism to these white castles, below which rests a "bed / of white flowers densely grown in an S / meaning Sweden and stalwartness" (132–33). The idyllic feel of this last scene suggests that Moore is less than confident she will be able to counter the dislocations of the modern world without succumbing to an equally problematic romanticizing of an object's origins. Yet Moore's speaker manages to look past the quixotic countryside, reminding herself once more of the solidity of function and utility. The final lines exchange the fetishized surfaces of the fantastic "thing" for "a surface that says / Made in Sweden: carts are my trade" (133). Resisting the process of dislocation lauded by other artists, the speaker inscribes the cart with the site of its production. She also engraves in the cart, not the decadent scrolls of artistic details, but the hard worn signs of "trade." Concluding her poem with these inscriptions of place and utility, Moore makes clear that her trade—that is, her poetry—will be devoted to the usefulness of "carts" instead of the aesthetic elegance of "carriages"—a term that, besides in her title, Moore never actually uses in her poem. Crafting such a homely poetry, Moore's undertakings in "A Carriage From Sweden" testify, requires an unspectacular kind of "stalwartness" rarely celebrated in modernist studies.

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Notes

1. The above quotations come from Hildegarde Lasell Watson Papers, "Notes About Marianne Moore" (IV. 1), located at the Rosenbach Museum & Library, Philadelphia. My grateful thanks to Dale Davis, the executor of the Watson estate, for permission to use material from the Watson papers. I also wish to thank the Center for American Literary Studies (CALS) at Penn State for funding my research in the summer of 2010 and Robin Schulze for her invaluable comments on various versions of this essay.

2. Moore's bequest and her permission for the Rosenbach display are located in the codicil she added to her last will and testament in 1968 ("The Marianne Moore Collection").

3. For more on Moore's shopping habits at Bryn Mawr and beyond, see Victoria Bazin (95-107).

4. Alison Rieke considers how Moore "fashions" (154) herself through animal-related objects and animal by-products (such as an elephant-hair bracelet and a pair of chamois gloves). For Rieke, Moore's "masculine" hunting of these animal objects sets her apart from the "typical female consumer" but also places her in an ethically fraught relationship with animal consumption (155).

5. I take the suggestion of the following contrasting objects from the Rosenbach Museum's catalogue, "The Marianne Moore Collection" (16).

6. On the whole, critics typically read the avant-garde and modernists as positioning themselves against an effeminized domestic scene. See Christopher Reed.

7. For my reading, I will be using the original formatting of "A Talisman" from *The Lantern*. Robin Schulze provides a detailed textual history of "A Talisman" and discusses some of the implications of the poem's variations in *Becoming Marianne Moore: The Early Poems, 1907-1924* (171).

8. Linda Leavell argues that, in 1915, Moore departs from metaphor in order to treat objects as objects (110-12). While certainly Moore does gravitate away from metaphorical objects, my reading of "A Talisman" suggests that she could suppress the effects of metaphor well before 1915.

9. Both of these men represent something of the highpoint of a civilization. If we are to take Moore to mean George Washington—who she regularly invoked with her colonial-style, tri-corner hat—her reference leads the reader to reflect on the mythologized origins of America's founding. Gustavus Adolphus, although probably more obscure to Moore's readers, embodies a similar my-

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thology, only in Swedish terms. Adolphus (1594–1632) was a legendary commander who, during the European-wide Thirty Years War, led the Swedish to international supremacy.

10. The way in which the observer's fetishistic gaze breaks the cart into an array of fragments also reveals how Moore's exhibition of the cart is of a piece with early colonial ethnography. Annie E. Coombes takes up the subject of how colonial discourse depended upon museum spaces in her essay, "The Recalcitrant Object: Cultural Contact and the Question of Hybridity." Coombes argues here that colonial ethnography, not unlike Moore's exhibition in this stanza, presented artifacts from the colonial periphery "as objects of aesthetic pleasure, exotic delectation and spectacle" to be consumed by museum audiences in a "scopic feast" (92).

11. See Cristanne Miller's discussion of "A Carriage From Sweden" in *Marianne Moore: Questions of Authority* (161–163). One of the few to comment on the poem's political context, Miller still asserts that the poem "remains primarily mythical rather than historical" (163).

12. See Robin G. Schulze's discussion of the poem in *The Web of Friendship: Marianne Moore and Wallace Stevens* (172–74). Schulze reads "A Carriage From Sweden" as a WWII poem, but she dissociates the carriage from this context by interpreting it as an "ordinary object" that Moore uses to "[counter] wartime despair" (172).

13. Particularly relevant here is Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, a documentary investigation into the trial of Nazi organizer, Adolf Eichmann. During his trial, Eichmann famously argued that he could not be convicted for his crimes because he was simply following orders of his superiors and the laws of Nazi Germany. Struck by how Eichmann differed from the popular conception of a war criminal, Arendt launched a philosophical analysis of the causes of genocide and of an individual's sense of responsibility with respect to such atrocities.

14. Cristanne Miller, like Schulze, supposes that Moore wants to persevere her cart as the final vestige of "a fine thing" in a war-torn world (162). But for Miller, Moore's cart is less of a material thing than a metonym for Swedish political excellence that the poet can rally in her critique of the United States' foreign policy.

15. Again, Charles Berger examines the role of "poetic skepticism" with respect to some of Moore's other poems, such as "The Steeple-Jack" (151–53).

16. The idea of an object that owns a designated place in relation to other objects recalls Martin Heidegger's understanding of "Things." Using the word

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"equipment" to describe the way certain objects work together to make up a larger functional relationship, Heidegger writes in his unfinished opus, *Being and Time*: "Equipment—in accordance with its equipmentality—always is *in terms of* its belonging with other equipment: ink-stand, pen, ink, paper, blotting pad, table lamp, furniture, windows, doors, room. The 'Things' never show themselves proximally as they are for themselves" (97-98).

17. Linda Leavell discerns that this poem claims "two geographical homes" (133).

18. Berger recognizes "The Jerboa" as part of a triptych of WWII poems, also including "The Steeple-Jack" and "The Hero," in which Moore expounds her "counter-heroics" (159). Berger adds that "The Jerboa," in particular, aims at critiquing the imperialist programs of Benito Mussolini.

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Modern American Abortion Narratives and the Century of Silence

Meg Gillette

"I finally found a doctor in West New York, New Jersey. The doctor was very sweet. He had pictures of crucifixes on the walls. It only cost $900. I went to a bank and took out a vacation loan. I am still paying it off."

"I found two psychiatrists who said that for $60 each they'd write a report which said I was mentally unstable and ought to have the abortion. I had to prove that I was crazy to get a legal abortion—and the abortion was the sanest thing I had ever done in my life."

"When you tell the man you're pregnant, he says, 'How do you know it was me? I'm not the only guy you ever slept with, am I?'"

"I was just living with this middle class guy, and my life was just like his. We were just going along, together. I didn't do anything strange or unusual. I didn't make any decisions. But one day I was pregnant. Then there was a difference."

—Redstockings Abortion Speak-Out

On March 21, 1969, the women's liberation group the Redstockings organized the first public abortion speak-out, "Abortion: Tell It Like It Is," for a crowd of 300 people in Greenwich Village's Washington Square

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Methodist Church. "The idea," organizer Irene Peskilis explains, "was to get examples of different kinds of experiences—women who'd had the babies that were taken away, women who went to the hospital for a therapeutic abortion, women who'd gone the illegal route, the different kinds of illegal routes" (qtd. in Brownmiller 108). Credited with taking "abortion out of the realm of private secrets and ma[king] it an issue that women could talk about in public," the speak-out has been hailed as "an important political tactic" (Reagan 230) and a "pivotal event in the development of the contemporary feminist discourse on abortion" (Dubriwny 396). What's forgotten in this tale of secrecy and outburst, though, are the large numbers of abortion narratives written and published by American writers in the 1910s, 20s, 30s, and 40s, narratives that helped set the stage for the later movement to decriminalize abortion by building new vocabularies and interested publics ready to speak out about abortion.

"The Century of Silence"

The story that historians usually tell about American abortion politics says that after the nationwide criminalization of abortion in the 1880s the issue of abortion fell silent. Early histories of American abortion practice and politics by Carroll Smith-Rosenberg and James Mohr skipped over the 1890s-1950s, and sociologist Kristin Luker, the first to study the years of criminalized abortion, declared this era "the century of silence" (40), a time when "on the public level, abortion was rarely discussed" (54). More recently, historian Leslie Reagan has complicated the "century of silence" thesis by reminding us that women did have abortions during the years when abortion was a crime and did "speak of their abortions among themselves and within smaller, more intimate spaces" (21). But like Luker, Reagan finds little public discussion of abortion during the early twentieth century. While Luker suspects that "medical 'ownership' of abortion" caused the public silence around it by "undercut[ting] potential opposition from all other quarters" (41-42), Reagan points to the red scare, arguing that "the association of legal abortion with Soviet socialism . . . ensured that a public discussion of the idea never developed" (142).

It was not until the late 1950s, and early 1960s—or so the story goes—that people began speaking publicly about abortion. By the 1950s

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and 1960s, advances in obstetrical science had virtually eliminated the need to perform abortions to save the life of the mother. With this old justification for therapeutic abortions gone and new medical dilemmas at hand—namely, a rubella epidemic and new research linking the morning sickness drug Thalidomide to birth defects—controversy erupted amongst the medical community as doctors entered into new debates about the conditions under which they would perform legal therapeutic abortions (Luker 66-91). Adding to the pressure on America's anti-abortion laws were the deteriorating conditions for illegal abortions (e.g., blindfolds, raids, deathbed interrogations) and the discriminatory enforcement of illegal abortion laws (wherein wealthy white women could arrange safe legal abortions while poor women and women of color faced dangerous back-alley abortions) (Reagan 160-92, Mohr 254-55). Meanwhile, as cracks were forming in the medical and legal communities on the issue of abortion, second-wave feminism was developing a theoretical basis for the movement to decriminalize abortion. "Once [women] had choices about life roles," Luker explains, "they came to feel that they had a *right to use abortion in order to control their own lives*" (118). Also adding to the interest in abortion reform were intensifying fears of overpopulation, growing interest in quality of life issues, and new data demonstrating the safety of abortion, all of which get credited with enlivening the 1960s movement for abortion reform (Mohr 246-54).

Left out of this narrative of repression and revolt, however, are the large numbers of abortion narratives published during the early twentieth century. While a vociferous public abortion discourse may not have appeared in the early twentieth-century newspapers, medical and court cases of public record, one did appear in the stories, novels, plays, and poems penned and published by American writers of the early twentieth century. From 1910 to 1945, more than seventy abortions were contemplated or had by characters in modern literature. Crossing traditional generic divides, abortion appeared in a wide range of canonical, political, avant-garde, and popular texts by a wide range of writers: Theodore Dreiser, T. S. Eliot, William Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Langston Hughes, Sinclair Lewis, Claude McKay, Gertrude Stein, Edith Wharton, William Carlos Williams, Floyd Dell, John Dos Passos, Josephine Herbst, Meridel Le Sueur, Ruth McKenney, Tess Slesinger, Agnes Smedley, Jessie Fauset, George Schuyler, Wallace Thurman, Kay Boyle, Mina Loy, Sophie Treadwell, Viña Delmar, Christopher Morley, Dorothy Parker, and many

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others.[1] In 1923, alluding to the large number of women having abortions in modern literature, Floyd Dell's *Janet March* complains, "and why . . . weren't [there] things like this in novels—oh, yes, there were dreadful things enough in novels, but they happened only to poor girls—ignorant and reckless girls" (211). By 1933, *Bookman* reviewer Dorthea Brande would marvel, "at the rate [abortion] is occurring as an item of the heroine's experience in current novels, it is likely to be looked upon as an initiation rite of our period by sociologists of the future." And by 1964, so common was abortion in American literature that a character in William Goldsmith's novel *Boys and Girls Together* could complain of an upcoming play, "*there better not be a* big abortion scene—I'm bored with them already" (629).

But while these early twentieth-century writers saw modern abortion narratives as a type, as a body of literature with cumulative force, more recent literary critics have tended to read these abortion narratives apart from one another, divorcing them from their collective power. Two critical commonplaces dominate contemporary literary criticism about modern abortion narratives. In one, the critic congratulates the writer as a maverick who bravely broaches the taboo topic of abortion: Tess Slesinger's open discussion of abortion in "Missis Flinders" (1932), for example, "was certainly a literary risk in the thirties" (Biagi 227); Ernest Hemingway submitted "Hills Like White Elephants" (1927) to the avant-garde *transition* magazine "because he knew no American periodical would accept a story about abortion, metaphorical or otherwise" (Wyche 69); Sinclair Lewis was "one of only a small group of American writers from the first half of the twentieth century who had their female characters seriously consider abortion" (Parry 69). In the other, the critic congratulates the writer for not really writing about abortion per se but for using it as a metaphor for some weightier subject. William Faulkner's *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem* (1939), for example, "cannot be reduced to a dialectic on abortion politics" because abortion "represents the deadend of modern individualism as much as the death of the maternal instinct" (Urgo 262, 269), serves as "so patent a metaphor for spiritual sterility" (Clark 70), and "challenges readers to reflect on the discourse of art" (Eldred 139). Overestimating the novelty of modern abortion narratives or privileging their metaphorical import over their abortion subject matter, contemporary criticism has seen modern abortion narratives as political anomalies or apolitical parables.

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New work on multi-authored collective rhetorics by communication theorists, however, suggests an alternative framework for thinking about modern abortion narratives. As Tasha Dubriwny reminds us in her work on the 1969 abortion speak-out, new vocabularies and ideologies are "rarely, if ever, the product of a single rhetor working in isolation," but rather, emerge "through the interaction of many voices" (397). According to Dubriwny, the political power of the abortion speak-out stemmed from its ability to link individuals' experiences together and move them into the realm of a shared social reality (401). For Dubriwny, collective rhetorics like the speak-out persuade not by "simply . . . altering . . . opinions," but by creating "situations in which the telling of individual experiences makes possible a reframing of one's understanding of the world" (396).

Dubrwiny's theory of collective rhetoric helps makes visible the political power of modern abortion narratives. Like the abortion speak-out Dubriwny analyzes, the multiple, overlapping abortion narratives of the early twentieth century created new meanings of abortion. Under a cloak of authorial innocence (it is the character, not the writer, who speaks publicly about abortion), modern abortion narratives taught readers how to shop for illegal abortions and debate America's abortion laws. The conventions and possibilities of imaginative literature (in contrast to those of how-to books or political manifestos) also shaped the abortion discourse modern abortion narratives developed. Privileging lived experience over medical expertise (as literature is wont to do), modern abortion narratives fractured the medical community's hold on abortion and conjured a community of women having abortions that reconstructed abortion as a shared experience. In addition, literature's symbolic register—its layering metaphorical meanings onto fictional abortions—did not dispense with reproductive politics (as some have assumed), but rather, helped make abortion a political issue. Writing abortion as an action against capitalist inequities, or as a consequence of women's liberation, or as a referendum on segregationist policies, etc., modern literature transformed abortion from a private woman's issue into a national political crisis. Long overlooked by both scholars of modern literature and scholars of reproductive history, modern abortion narratives played an important part in American abortion politics, teaching readers about criminalized abortion and calling them to judge for themselves America's anti-abortion laws.[2]

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Meg Gillette

How to buy an abortion

Though it was illegal during the early twentieth century to sell products intended to induce an abortion, abortifacients (e.g., pennyroyal pills, ergot, quinine, rubber catheters, slippery elm, orange sticks, etc.) sold in gas stations, garages, restaurants, soda fountains, barber shops, pool rooms, cigar stands, newsstands, shoe-shine parlors, grocery stores, and, of course, drugstores across the country. One drugstore near Grand Central carried a selection of thirty-four preparations (Tolnai 425). As *The Forum* reported in 1938, "The open trade in abortifacients is enormous; in all drugstores they sell heavily, in some running second in sales only to laxatives" (Kaley 35). However, while the abortifacient trade flourished during the early twentieth century (estimated at a two-hundred and fifty-million-dollar industry), the American Medical Association argued these over-the-counter remedies were, at best, ineffective and, at worst, dangerous. Had "a really safe, reliable abortifacient drug existed," reasoned one AMA doctor, "it would be used for therapeutic abortions," and a study by the New York Birth-Control Clinical Research Bureau found that, indeed, abortifacients failed to induce an abortion 45% of the time (Tolnai 425). As Louis Blanchard Kaley concluded in *The Forum,* the efficacy of abortifacients "may be stated thus: *Doses which do not endanger life fail their purpose; doses which succeed may be fatal*" (36).

Modern abortion narratives helped spread this message. In the days before sex-ed classes and the FDA, modern abortion plots cautioned readers from purchasing dangerous and ineffective abortificient pills. "None of it's any good," Maude tells Dot in Viña Delmar's *Bad Girl* (1928). "There's no medicine in the world that will do the trick. You have to have an operation" (107). Dr. Glenn in Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* (1925) likewise explains to the heroine (and to the novel's readers) that the pills she has taken "wouldn't be likely to be of any real service to you, if you were pregnant" (422). Indeed, not one heroine in the sixty abortion narratives included in this bibliography successfully induces an abortion with an over-the-counter remedy; instead, the pills she takes only make her sick: "But all that these evil brews did was increase her sickness and lassitude" (Kelley 286), "And this made her exceedingly sick—so much so that when Clyde arrived at six-thirty he was really moved by her deathly white face" (Dreiser 394), "She was tired of medicine and of baths so hot they burned your skin" (Delmar 105-6).

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Explaining that doctor-performed abortions were the only way to go, modern abortion narratives offered follow-up advice on how to negotiate a fair price. Haggling was a part of many women's abortion experience. More than a third of the twenty-four women who testified at the criminal trial against Chicago abortionist Dr. Gabler recalled haggling to lower the cost of their abortion: Helen N. got the $65 fee lowered to $50 by explaining that she had only paid $50 for her last abortion; Charlotte B. refused the $65 by complaining that a "lady friend" had only paid $50; Paula F. got her $35 counter-offer accepted by first pretending to leave the doctor's office (People v. Martin). Modern abortion narratives helped prepare readers to enter the illegal abortion market by readying them with bargaining scripts. "Tell her to wear her old clothes or he'll charge a hundred" (327), advises Miss Bradley in Margery Latimer's *This Is My Body* (1930). In Dreiser's *An American Tragedy,* the protagonist coaches his girlfriend to reference a referral and hide her small income:

> Then you'd better say, too, that you wouldn't have come to him only you that you heard of another case in which he helped some one else—that a girl told you, see. Only you don't want to let on that you're paid much, I mean,—because if you do he may want to make the pill more than I can pay, see. (412)

Other abortion narratives alerted readers to the possibility of sexually aggressive doctors: the doctor in Delmar's *Bad Girl* "bent over and touched [Dot's] breasts," asking "'Sure you're married?'. . . .'I like to help little girls out'" (114), while the soda clerk impersonating a pharmacist in William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* (1930) propositions Dewey Dell, "You come back at ten o'clock tonight. . . .Ever hear about the hair of the dog" (247). Giving readers practical scripts for negotiating the price of the abortion and warning readers of the potential for sexual abuse, modern abortion narratives circulated valuable information about how to negotiate the illegal abortion market.

By the late 1960s, a woman seeking an illegal abortion might turn to the *The Abortion Handbook for Responsible Women* (1969), *The Abortees Songbook* (1969), or the underground abortion referral service "Jane" (est. 1969) for help. But in the early twentieth century, when political organizations were shying away from the topic of abortion, modern literature was a crucial place (along with friends and family) where readers could go with their questions about abortion. As Dot asks when friend Maude gives her abortion advice in Viña Delmar's *Bad Girl,* "Gee, you know a lot. . . .Did the doctor tell you or did you read it in a book?" (108).

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Debating abortion

At the same time that modern abortion narratives were offering readers tutorials in how to shop for illegal abortions, they were also readying readers with arguments to debate America's anti-abortion laws. Celeste Condit, in her study of 1960s abortion reform rhetoric, argues that "for a broad public to feel sorry for the agent and angry with the forces that bring [a woman] suffering, the character depicted must be 'good,' or, at the least, unable to control her own destiny" (25). Accordingly, 1960s abortion reformers, she argues, sought to expand the parameters for legal therapeutic abortions by telling stories of good girls—seduced and abandoned, or married and poor—who sought abortions not because they were "making a choice *against* motherhood," but because they were making a choice "against situations which themselves violated the idealized image of motherhood" (26).

Calling attention to the abortions had by seduced and abandoned good girls and poor married woman, modern abortion narratives defended the practice of abortion in certain, extreme cases, anticipating the 1960s reform movement, which, years later, would tell similar stories in support of liberalizing America's therapeutic abortion laws. The unmarried, seduced and abandoned girls seeking abortions in Eugene O'Neill's "The Abortion" (1914), Dorothy Parker's "Mr. Durant" (1924), and Sidney Kingsley's *Men in White* (1933), for example, are all unabashedly good: Nellie Murray "is a sweet, lovely girl in spite of everything" (O'Neill 212), "Rose was not a coquettish girl" (Parker 25), and Nurse Dennin is not "just a tramp. . . .She's a fine, sensitive girl!" (Kingsley 125). The poor married mothers of Edith Summers Kelley's *Weeds* (1923) and William Carlos Williams's "A Cold Front" (1944) are also sympathetically drawn. In *Weeds,* the wife of a sharecropper and mother of three refuses to bear more children "condemned to a life of toilsome grubbing in dirt that ended only with the grave" (285), and the unnamed woman in "A Cold Front" seeks pills for an abortion, not because she rejects motherhood (she has "seven foster children / and a new baby of her own" [lines 2-3]), but because like "a cat / on a limb [she is] too tired to go higher" (11-12). Many modern abortion narratives, then, defended the practice of abortion in certain, extreme cases, anticipating the 1960s reform movement, which, years later, would tell similar stories in support of liberalizing America's therapeutic abortion laws.

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Kingsley's *Men in White* contains even more vehement critiques of criminalized abortion, as does Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*. According to Gertrude Fairbanks, Dresier once told her that "his main object [in *An American Tragedy*] was to show what tragedy and harm can result from our vicious anti-abortion laws" (qtd. in Davies 30). In a 1935 essay, "I Find the Real American Tragedy," he complains that Chester Gillette (the real person on whom the novel's Clyde Griffiths is based) never would have had to murder his girlfriend Billy Brown had abortion been readily available:

> If at the moment when [Chester] stood in the boat and was ready to strike Billy Brown with the tennis racket, a voice had called: "Stop! You don't have to do that in order to escape. Here's a thousand dollars. Take the girl to a doctor. Have an operation performed. Give her this money and tell her how deeply you desire to be released and why, and she will release you!"—there is no question in my mind, and none in yours, that he would have dropped the racket and gladly gone about the business of giving this girl her life and her freedom. Is there any sane person on the face of the earth who will honestly deny the validity of this? But life—circumstances—would not have it so. (12)

Like Dreiser, Kingsley also identifies criminalized abortion as the source of his characters' tragedy. When Nurse Dennin gets sepsis from a botched illegal abortion, an extended footnote speaks longingly of the Soviet Union where women can have safe abortions performed by doctors in hospitals:

> [In America] the lash of the law, instead of correcting the evil, only whips it into dark corners, creating a vicious class of criminal practitioner—bootleg doctors and ignorant midwives who work in dark, back-room apartments. A saner, healthier attitude is that adopted by the Soviet government, which is fostering birth control education, and instituting legal abortion clinics. (108)

Though the footnote bemoans abortion as an inevitable "evil," it nonetheless advocates the Soviet's "saner healthier" system of legalized abortion where education and expertise render unnecessary the dangerous illegal abortions performed by a "vicious class of criminal practitioner" in America.

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While *An American Tragedy* and *Men in White* bemoan the deadly consequences of America's anti-abortion laws, other modern abortion narratives strike at the ethics and legitimacy of America's anti-abortion laws. The eponymous heroines of Floyd Dell's *Janet March,* Sinclair Lewis's *Ann Vickers* (1932), and Christopher Morley's *Kitty Foyle* (1939), for instance, refuse to think of their abortions as a sin or a crime: "Sin? No, sin was something strange and terrible and mysterious. It wasn't sin. What was it, then? It was—freedom" muses Janet March (213); "If this [abortion] had been a crime, condemned by all respectable nations," Ann Vickers thinks, "then she was confused as to what was crime and what were criminals" (214); and Kitty Foyle reports, "Maybe I just haven't any moral sense . . . but I couldn't feel any kind of wrongness. I did what I had to do" (152). The characters in Viña Delmar's *Bad Girl* (1928), Josephine Herbst's *The Executioner Waits* (1934), and Ruth McKenney's *Jake Home* (1943), stress women's right to make their own decisions about their bodies: "She'd have to come to a decision by herself. A man would have a hell of a nerve to tell her to go ahead and have the baby. It was her job to bear the pain, her job to tend to the little thing for years to come. What right had a man to say what she should do?" (Delmar 117); "You have to decide. . . .It's your life. . . .I don't think anyone can decide but yourself'" (Herbst 193); "It's your business; if you didn't want it, you did the right thing" (McKenney 444). Unapologetic and committed to women's reproductive autonomy, these narratives sound much like the arguments made by the 1960s women's movement, which years later would also hold controlling one's reproduction was a right, not a sin.

Still, while many abortion narratives built cases and voiced arguments for the reform or repeal of America's anti-abortion laws, others featured villainous abortionists, murdered babies, and post-abortion remorse that corroborated the legal proscription against abortion. Portraits of abortionists as sinister ("certainly an evil as well as a mysterious man" [Stein 74]), unsanitary ("There had been blood, as well as dirt, on his hands" [Dell 210]), lecherous ("he bent over and touched her breasts" [Delmar 114]), and greedy ("'Have you got the change?' [Charity] asked a little breathlessly, laying one of the twenty dollar bills on the table [for the $5 consultation fee]. 'Change? What'd I want to have change for?'... Dr. Merkle answered" [Wharton 191]) echoed the American Medical Association's antiabortion campaign, which had attacked abortionists as "prostitutes" (Jackson 663) and "villains" who "blacken . . . our profession"

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(Duff). Pro-life rhetorics of fetal life and post-abortion remorse also circulate in modern abortion narratives. Although Eddie in *Bad Girl* argues publicly for a woman's right to determine the outcome of her pregnancy, he secretly abhors abortion and hopes his wife will choose to have the baby: "It was murder as Eddie saw it, murder to snuff out the little germ of life that flickered so uncertainly, that little germ that grew to be a kid in overalls with a dirty face who asked for pennies and was proud of his Daddy" (117-18). Lewis's *Ann Vickers* also complicates its reformist appeals with a concurrent rhetoric of fetal life and post-abortion guilt. After her abortion, Ann fantasizes about what her child would have been like ("her girl should be named *Pride*" [220]), and although the narrator calls her remorse irrational ("unreasoningly, her baby became a reality to her"), nonetheless she is assailed with guilt ("she longed for it, wistfully, then savagely, accusing herself of its murder" [218]). Megan Foster of Latimer's *This Is My Body* also berates herself for her abortion ("Dirty—vile—I've betrayed myself. I've punished and violated and betrayed my own self" [330]), as does the speaker of Gwendolyn Brooks's "the mother" (1945) who begins, "Abortions will not let you forget / the children you got that you did not get" (lines 1-2). Animating the fetus as a living child and subjecting their heroines to post-abortion grief, such representations helped justify America's anti-abortion laws.

Rife with arguments for and against illegal abortion, modern literature played an important role in developing and circulating an early public abortion debate. While an organized movement to decriminalize abortion in the United States wouldn't become prominent until the 1960s, in the literature of the 1910s, 20s, 30s, and 40s, debates about America's abortion laws were already well underway.

The woman-as-expert

As modern abortion narratives staged such public debates, they also authorized modern audiences to enter into these debates, rejecting the idea that one needed to have a medical degree to contribute to them. Of the sixty abortion narratives studied here, only three proceed from a doctor's point of view; the remainder proceed from the points of view of everyday men and women—e.g., college football heroes (O'Neill's "The Abortion" [1914]), labor organizers (Dreiser's "The Girl in the Coffin" [1916]), servants (Hughes's "Cora Unashamed" [1934]), lesbians (Stein's

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"The Good Anna" [1909]), childhood friends (Powell's *A Time to Be Born* [1943]), even small children (Faulkner's "That Evening Sun" [1931]), etc. Most of the time, though, the narrative proceeds from the point of view of the woman contemplating or having the abortion. As Lewis's Ann Vickers declares, "This experience belongs to *me*" (211), and Slesinger's "Missis Flinders" likewise insists that people need to hear from *her* what it's like to have an abortion: she wants "to say to the [the women at the maternity home] . . . I too have known my breasts to swell and harden, I too have been unable to sleep on them for their tenderness to weight and touch, I too have known what it is to undress slowly and imagine myself growing night to night" (10). Taking seriously women's experiential knowledge, these narratives authorized a new woman-as-expert with a perspective on abortion that deserved to be heard.

Also authorizing women's experiences with abortion were double abortion plots, wherein the protagonist considers or has an abortion shortly after another character has had one. A significant number of abortion narratives in this bibliography draw parallels between the abortion experiences of different women.[4] Floyd Dell's eponymous Janet March interrupts her cousin's tale of helping girls find abortions with the news of her own pregnancy and intent to have an abortion: "'I [also] know a girl who's in trouble—and doesn't want to marry the man—and—will you help her?' 'I don't know,' her cousin answers, 'Who is she?' 'It's—me'" (209). In Lewis's *Ann Vickers,* just fifteen pages before Ann seeks an abortion for herself, she helps get an abortion for one of the girls in her reformatory. "Weren't you trying to pump me about an abortionist a few weeks ago?" (209) notices Ann's friend Dr. Malvina Wormser when Ann comes to her for abortion information a second time. Charlotte's deadly abortion in Faulkner's *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem* likewise follows on the heels of an ancillary abortion plot: she convinces Harry to perform an abortion for their neighbor just prior to convincing him to perform an abortion on herself. Abortion narratives also repeat in Margery Latimer's *This Is My Body,* where first college friend Arvia has an abortion and then twenty pages later Megan has one herself. In Josephine Herbst's *Money For Love*, the two love interests both have histories with abortion: Harriet is blackmailing her ex after having an illegal abortion, and Jerry is mourning his wife who just died after a botched abortion. Lillian Smith's

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Strange Fruit (1944) also juxtaposes two abortion plots: when Bess tells Nonnie that Grace Stephenson, the daughter of the family Bess works for, is pregnant, Nonnie replies "I'm pregnant too" (123), and after arguing with Nonnie about her having an abortion, Bess returns to work and overhears Grace's family planning her abortion ("Mother—is it bad as—having a baby?" [294] Bess hears Grace ask). Linking together abortion stories of major and minor characters from diverse backgrounds, these double abortion narratives draw together a community of women with common experiences that fracture the stigma and isolation of abortion.

Other abortion narratives use literary allusion to draw together a community of women having abortions. In Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying,* for example, Dewey Dell's father uses her abortion money to buy his new teeth,[5] recalling Lil in Eliot's *The Waste Land* using the money to fix her teeth for an abortion instead. Lewis's *Ann Vickers* plays off of Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* as, marveling at her likeness to other literary heroines having abortions, Ann reflects, "Why, it was comic! It was all too complete: the picture of the innocent country girl seduced by the city slicker who became engaged to the heiress and was reluctant to marry his victim" (206). Dawn Powell's Amanda Keeler in *A Time to Be Born* (1943) also confronts her likeness to stereotypes of poor, deviant women having abortions: "Can you imagine! Like that idiot girl on the other side of the Lakeville Cemetery that everybody made fun of. Like those factory girls at the Fallen Women's Home outside of Cleveland! Here I am—all the money in the world—thirty-two years old—and as helpless as some farm girl in trouble" (286). Denouncing the inadequacy of such narratives, Amanda's friend Victoria theorizes abortion as an experience shared by women of all types: "Right in the twentieth century, a woman in a jam is still a woman in a jam! It's something to write about, isn't it" (287), she adds suggestively.

At the 1969 Redstockings abortion speak-out, women would also piggyback their abortion stories to contest the isolation and stigma of illegal abortion. But in modern literature, a community of women with like experiences was also being formed. Giving voice to women's experiential knowledge of abortion and linking together women's abortion experiences through double abortion plots and literary allusions, modern literature also called forward a generation of women-experts to speak out.

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The personal is political

One of the reasons the Redstockings's abortion speak out was so powerful, Dubriwny argues, was because it gave "individual experiences new meanings by moving them into the realm of social reality" (401). Modern abortion narratives did this too. Writing abortion as a turning point in stories dealing with other social issues (e.g., class mobility, the left, women's liberation, racial segregation), modern fiction reinterpreted the meaning of abortion, transforming it from an isolated act in a woman's life into a referendum on the day's most pressing social issues. Far from supplanting the works' reproductive politics, the other concerns in these narratives served to imbue abortion with broader political significance.

Fictional abortion narratives work differently than do their non-fictional counterparts. A non-fiction diary entry from rural schoolteacher Lester Ward (who later helped found American sociology), for example, describes both his wife's abortion and his frustrated career ambitions:

> The truth is that she was going to have a child, but she took an effective remedy which she had secured from Mrs. Gee. It did its work and she is out of danger. The proof is the milk. The sick from the Forts are still being brought to us, and they are very sick. There was one died last night at nine o'clock. Doctor Peer found something to accuse me of this morning, but what I told him was sufficient to quiet him marvelously. No attention is yet paid to my requests to be freed from duty at the High School. I drew rations yesterday at the Company and today from the Hospital. I have begun to study Greek, learning the paradigms first. (140)

Because the passage comes from a diary entry (and not, say, a prose poem), most readers will assume that Ward discusses the abortion, the dead from the Civil War, the declined job transfer, and his study of Greek in the same entry because the events happened to fall around the same time (not because the soldier symbolizes the fetus or because Greek symbolizes a renaissance in their relationship, etc.). But imaginative literature, because it has artistic license, strikes a different deal with readers. Were we to encounter the juxtaposition of an abortion with a dead soldier in a poem (as, for example, is the case in Randall Jarrell's "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner") we wouldn't assume a historical principle of combination (that the events just happened to occur at the same time), but rather a symbolic principle of combination (that the events

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share some hidden relation): Charlotte Beck, for example, reading "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner," interprets the abortion imagery as the "metaphorical conceit" of the poem," while Richard Fein imagines that "the essence of the [poem] . . . *is symbolized* . . . in the role of mother as purveyor of death to the child" (158, emphasis added). Whereas in the diary entry Ward's wife coincidentally took an abortificent the same day a soldier was brought dead to the infirmary, in "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner," the abortion of the fetus is *like* the death of a soldier, a tragic sacrifice (as opposed to, say, a woman's empowering choice). Able to draw metaphorical comparisons and freely contextualize and explain events, imaginative literature brought to the field of abortion discourse opportunities for imbuing abortion with new meanings.

Based on the true story of Chester Gillette, Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* benefits from both the artistic license of imaginative literature and the presumed authenticity of non-fiction. In this selective telling of the Gillette case, Dreiser combines events to characterize abortion, not as an isolated incident in a woman's life, but as an essential weapon in the hands of the poor. In Dreiser's telling, Clyde's rags-to-riches assent hinges on his ability to get his pregnant girlfriend an abortion. With fraternization between foreman and floor girls forbidden, an abortion would save his job: "And if I lost my place here now, and with no money and that kind of scandal connected with me, where do you suppose I would be after that, or you either?" (445-46). He also needs to find Roberta an abortion because it would free him to pursue his courtship of the upperclass Sonda Finchley and realize his dreams of marrying into a wealthy family: "For after all, who was [Roberta]? A factory girl! The daughter of parents who lived and worked on a farm and one who was compelled to work for her own living. Whereas he—he—if fortune would but favor him a little—! Was this to be the end of all his dreams in connection with his prospective superior life here?" (346-47). Yet, as *An American Tragedy* elaborates, this important strategy of class advancement is not available to members of the working class: in Dreiser's telling, doctors only perform abortions "where family and other neighborhood and religious considerations had made it seem quite advisable" (416). Framing abortion as a mechanism of class mobility withheld from the working class, *An American Tragedy* politicizes abortion, transforming it from a private woman's issue into a fulcrum in the struggle between the haves and have nots.

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Where *An American Tragedy* envisions abortion as an essential means of working class empowerment, Tess Slesinger's *The Unpossessed* (1934) bemoans abortion as the misogynist subterfuge of a defunct leftist-politics. *The Unpossessed* tells two interrelated stories: in one, a group of intellectuals plan a Leftist magazine but don't follow through; in the other, the wife of one of them gets pregnant and has an abortion. Drawing them together, the novel parallels Margaret's plans for the baby and her husband Miles's plans to start a magazine:

> *December, January, February*, Margaret thought.
>
> "I propose," (the thing took all his strength) "oh what the hell," [Miles] cried, "what's stopping us? I propose that we *have* the God damn Magazine."
>
> *March, April, May*, thought Margaret. (98–99)

As Joy Castro observes, the syntax of the chapter's title "Why Can't We Have a Magazine?" also draws a likeness between the magazine and the baby, "by cry[ing] out for the substitution of the term *baby* for *magazine*" (28). In the end, though, neither the magazine nor the pregnancy comes to fruition, as the radicals give up the magazine at the same time that Margaret has an abortion. Riding home from the maternity hospital, she catalogs her abortion in a list of the Left's failures:

> Intellectuals they were, bastards, changelings . . . giving up a baby for economic freedom which meant that two of them would work in offices instead of one of them only, giving up a baby for intellectual freedom which meant that they smoked their cigarettes bitterly and looked out of the windows of a taxi onto streets and people and stores and hated them all. (345)

For Slesinger, to choose abortion is to side with a host of pseudo-intellectual nonsense. Far from a private woman's issue, in *The Unpossessed*, abortion represents and signifies all of the failures of the Left.[6]

Other novels politicized abortion, not in relation to the Left but in relation to feminism. In both Lewis's *Ann Vickers* and Faulkner's *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem*, abortion comes into view as a referendum on feminism. For Ann Vickers, abortion is the price paid for feminist liberation: "I murdered you, Pride," Ann laments, "and so I am Dr. Vickers, superintendent of a prison! And with a great sum obtained I this freedom" (399). Beset with remorse after having her illegal abortion, Ann renounces not just the

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practice of abortion but the "feminist" principles she associates with it:

> I want Pride, my daughter. I want to bear her. I have a right to her. . . .How simple we were when we used to talk about something called 'Feminism'! We were going to be just like men, in every field. We can't. Either we're stronger (say, as rulers, like Queen Elizabeth) or we're weaker, in our subservience to children. For all we said in 1916, we're still women, not embryonic men—thank God! (409)

In Ann Vickers's telling, post-abortion remorse becomes evidence of innate gender differences and the fallacious thinking of early twentieth-century feminism. Charlotte's disastrous abortion in Faulkner's *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem* also comes into view as proof against feminism. Killing off its fallen woman as nineteenth-century texts had done before, this novel references the genre's disciplinary logic and invites us to read the characters' disastrous abortion as a judgment on their prior flouting of sexual convention. As Janet Eldred observes, Charlotte's end is "right out of the conventions for nineteenth-century heroines who violate sexual norms" (155) and leads us "finally to realize that this female creative power, this 'dominating feminine impulse' is a threat to the race" (156). Contextualizing abortion as the denouement of its "fallen woman" storyline, *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem* presents Charlotte's abortion not as an isolated medical procedure, but as a punishment for, and verdict on, the failures of radical gender politics.[7]

Lillian Smith's best-selling novel *Strange Fruit* also brings abortion into view as the center of a national political controversy. Combining a lynching plot with an abortion plot, it is the story of the interracial love affair between the black Nonnie Anderson and the white Tracy Deen. In *Strange Fruit,* the question of whether to have a baby or an abortion coheres, not as a personal choice, but as a question of racial allegiance and national responsibility. According to sister Bess, Nonnie must have an abortion in order to "follow American ways" (124). Urging Nonnie to have an abortion because it is what white women do ("they wouldn't want [the baby]—they'd be too shamed to want it," she later insists [292]), Bess colors abortion as a white reproductive practice and act of assimilation Nonnie must make to succeed in a white world. For the white Dr. Deen, abortion is also a mechanism of racial politics. Although Deen does not approve of abortion in cases where the girl "*did it for fun because*

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she liked him" (154), he qualifies that "if a nigger had raped her, it'd be different—it'd be different, but" (151). Allowing for abortion in cases of white women's rape by black men, Deen mobilizes abortion as a nativist mechanism for policing white racial purity and supremacy. Despite the differences between Bess's and Deen's racial politics, their abortion politics come from a similar place: for both, abortion is a way to negotiate relations between blacks and whites, an action bearing on the segregation or desegregation of the South. Framing characters' abortion politics in terms of their racial politics, *Strange Fruit* represents the decision to have a baby or abortion as having consequences for the racial composition of the United States, a matter of interest to more than the pregnant woman herself. In *Strange Fruit,* abortion isn't an individual woman's private decision, but a vote for a pluralist or nativist America, a national racial referendum.[8]

Today abortion is not just a transitive act in a woman's life, but the political issue on which nearly everyone has an opinion. Modern abortion narratives helped pave the way for this politicization of abortion. While, no doubt, modern abortion plots aren't just about abortion—they deal with a host of other issues ranging from "spiritual sterility" (Clark 70) to "modern individualism" (Urgo 269) to "female creative power" (Eldred 156) to the "failure of left-wing politics" (Castro 27), etc—certainly, one of the things modern abortion narratives are about is abortion. Taking advantage of its generic possibilities—its creative license to draw connections and invest symbolic meaning, its cloak of authorial innocence (i.e., the writer isn't speaking publicly about abortion, the fictional characters are), its broad audience of diverse reading publics—modern literature created a significant abortion discourse during the early twentieth century, one that moved abortion into the realm of social reality, shattered the medical community's hold on abortion, and created interested publics ready and authorized to judge abortion for themselves.

Notes

1. From 1900 to 1945, abortion appeared in a wide range of canonical, political, avant-garde, and popular texts including (but not limited to): Gertrude Stein's "The Good Anna" (1909), Mina Loy's "Parturition" (1913), Eugene O'Neill's *The Abortion* (1914), Pearl Dolores Bell's *Gloria Gray, Love Pirate* (1914), Edgar Lee Masters's "Editor Whedon" (1916), Theodore Dreiser's *The Girl in the Coffin* (1916), Edith Wharton's *Summer* (1917), T. S. Eliot's *The Waste*

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Land (1922), F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Beautiful and the Damned* (1922), A. S. M. Hutchinson's *This Freedom* (1922), Josephine Herbst's *Following the Circle* (1922, unpublished), Floyd Dell's *Janet March* (1923), Edith Summers Kelley's *Weeds* (1923), Dorothy Day's *The Eleventh Virgin* (1924), Dorothy Parker's "Mr. Durant" (1924), Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* (1925), John Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer* (1925), Frances Newman's *The Hard-Boiled Virgin* (1926), Ernest Hemingway's "Hills Like White Elephants" (1927), Viña Delmar's *Bad Girl* (1928), Sophie Treadwell's *Machinal* (1928), Josephine Herbst's *Money for Love* (1929), Agnes Smedley's *Daughter of Earth* (1929), Wallace Thurman's *The Blacker the Berry* (1929), William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* (1930), Margery Latimer's *This Is My Body* (1930), William Faulkner's "That Evening Sun" and "Hair" (1931), George Schuyler's *Black No More* (1931), Claude McKay's "Truant" (1932), Sinclair Lewis's *Ann Vickers* (1932), Dorothy Parker's "Lady with a Lamp" (1932), Tess Slesinger's "Missis Flinders" (1932, republished as final chapter of *The Unpossessed* in 1934), Arnold Zweig's *Young Women of 1914* (translated from German and published in America in 1932), Sidney Kingsley's *Men in White* (1933), Kay Boyle's *My Next Bride* (1934), Josephine Herbst's *The Executioner Waits* (1934), Langston Hughes's "Cora Unashamed" (1934), Meridel Le Sueur's "Annunciation" (1935), e.e. cummings's "this little" (1935), Young Ward's *Young Ward's Diary* (1935), Ruth Lechlinter's "Lines for an Abortionist's Office" (1936), Ernest Hemingway's *To Have and Have Not* (1937), William Faulkner's *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem* (1939), Josephine Herbst's *Rope of Gold* (1939), Christopher Morley's *Kitty Foyle* (1939), Meridel LeSueur's *The Girl* (1939, published in 1978), Nancy Hale's *The Prodigal Women* (1942), Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's *Cross Creek* (1942), Ruth McKenney's *Jake Home* (1943), Dawn Powell's *A Time To Be Born* (1943), Robert Penn Warren's *At Heaven's Gate* (1943), Lillian Smith's *Strange Fruit* (1944), William Carlos Williams's "A Cold Front" (1944), Irwin Shaw's *Sons and Soldiers* (1944), Gwendolyn Brooks's "the mother" (1945), Randall Jarrell's "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner" (1945), Sinclair Lewis's *Kingsblood Royal* (1945), Betty MacDonald's *The Egg and I* (1945), and Betty Smith's *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1945). Such a list in modern literature seems doomed to be incomplete, but it nonetheless reveals a substantial public abortion discourse yet to be accounted for by historians or literary scholars.

2. For more on modern literature's engagement with modern reproductive crises, see Laura Doyle, Katrina Irving, Angela Berg, Daylanne English, and Beth Widmaier Capo.

3. In William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, an abrupt displacement of a woman's point of view occurs as, instead of Dewey Dell narrating the two abortion shopping scenes, they are narrated by two strangers—a pharmacist and a soda

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jerk pretending to be a pharmacist. Medical expertise is likewise compromised by William Carlos Williams's poem "A Cold Front" where the ambiguity of the final lines, "In a case like this I know / quick action is the main thing" (lines 19–20) (will he perform an abortion quickly, or throw her out of the office quickly?) calls into question the doctor's seeming confidence. And although Sidney Kingsley's Pulitzer Prize winning play *Men in White* upholds the medical profession's authority over abortion, it does so with a twist, harnessing their authority to argue, not for, but against criminalized abortion. As Dr. Hockenberg complains, "Some of our laws belong to the Dark Ages! Why can't we help the poor and the ignorant? The others will always help themselves—law or no law" (108).

4. This process of building on the stories of others produces what Susan Kalcalls "kernel stories": "Kernel stories are emergent structures. They emerge from the context in which they appear to support another woman's story, to help achieve a tone of harmony in the group, or to fit the topic under discussion or develop a topic with related ideas" (8).

5. For more on *As I Lay Dying*'s relationship to *The Waste Land,* see Mary Jane Dickerson.

6. Other examples of proletarian abortion narratives that write abortion as a referendum on the Left include Meridel LeSueur's *The Girl* and Ruth McKenney's *Jake Home.* The former blames the protagonists' coerced abortion on the political failures of the Left, while the latter defends the Left as a bastion of pro-natalist politics.

7. Other examples of abortion narratives that plot abortion as facilitating or derailing a young woman's intellectual and sexual development include Kelley's *Weeds,* Dell's *Janet March,* Smedley's *Daughter of Earth,* Latimer's *This Is My Body,* and Morley's *Kitty Foyle.* For the protagonists in *Weeds* and *Daughter of Earth,* abortions are occasions to renew intellectual and artistic commitments (Judith resolves not to have any more children and Marie enrolls in a teacher college), while Janet March defends her abortion as an expression of female power ("What was it, then? It was—freedom" [213]). Alternatively, *This is My Body* writes abortion as a mechanism of patriarchal control (a college dean has his co-ed girlfriend strapped down and given an abortion) and the protagonist, devastated by her coerced abortion, charges modern masculinity with weakness, for standing in the way of women's sexual freedom: "You know what an abortion is, don't you?. . . . An abortion is where a man won't do his part. He makes the doctor take it so he can go back to his wife and children" (306).

8. Other examples of narratives that interpret abortion as a mechanism of racial politics include Hughes's "Cora Unashamed," Thurman's *Blacker the Berry,* and

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Lewis's *Kingsblood Royal*. In "Cora Unashamed," the bigoted Mrs. Studevant compels Jesse to have an abortion to preserve racial purity, as she had "ambitions which didn't include the likes of Greek ice-cream makers' sons" (13). In *Blacker the Berry* and *Kingsblood Royal*, men and women contemplate abortion as a way to unsettle racial hierarchies (since giving birth to dark-skinned babies would "out" their racial identity and prevent their continued passing).

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Reviews

The Genius of Democracy: Fictions of Gender and Citizenship in the United States, 1860-1945
by Victoria Olwell
University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011. 304 pages

Jennifer L. Fleissner

As Victoria Olwell is well aware, few concepts likely seem more obsolescent in contemporary scholarship than the idea of genius. Not so long ago it retained some usefulness, if only as an object of critique: by historicists, as an ideological mystification; by poststructuralists, as a fetishization of the author-function; by feminists, as a self-aggrandizing masculine ideal. More recently, however, in an era when even the *New York Times* has proclaimed "Lone geniuses are out. Collaboration is in," the notion of the solitary Great Mind towering over all contemporaries will probably induce less outrage than mere head scratching.[1]

Enter Olwell's first book, provocatively titled *The Genius of Democracy,* and focusing on the importance of the category of genius for, of all things, American feminist arguments made in the decades before and after the advent of women's suffrage. Clearly, this is not the genius talk we thought we knew. "Let us own ourselves, our earnings, our genius!" cried feminist activist Frances Gage in 1855 (qtd. in Olwell 1). As Olwell comments, with the writerly pith and punch that are among her fine book's many pleasures, "Within the familiar idiom of liberal democracy, Gage's exhortation is exactly two-thirds intelligible." Indeed. Possessive individualism, check; its basis in property-ownership, check. But *genius*? A "genius" of *democracy?* How to square "democracy"—let alone feminism—with what we think of as the most elitist category imaginable?

To begin to do so, Olwell returns us to Emerson, and specifically to his lecture "Genius," some parts of which found later expression in the more well-known "Self-Reliance." There, she argues, we find a conception of genius, typical in fact of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century usages, that calls the term's association with a privileged individualism into question. Rather than a commanding power exerted from within, genius appears in writings like Emerson's as an alien force that overtakes

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the individual, as when "The Poet" "suffer[s] the ethereal tides to roll and circulate through him" (qtd in Olwell 4); it emerges when the boundaries of selfhood fail. Hence, Olwell shows, the genius of great men for Emerson lies less in their unique specificity than in their uncanny ability to embody a larger collectivity, to be in this sense "representative" of something beyond themselves: "The man of genius apprises us not of his wealth but of the commonwealth" (56) For this reason, his magical effect as an orator is to make each member of the audience believe that "he too can speak" (57)—thus, his distinctive powers work to bring into being a democratic populace.

While Emerson's genius may have received a masculine pronoun, Olwell shows that the ideas here took on especial meaning for many women writers both in his own era and beyond. As she argues, if genius was less about rationality and autonomy than "spontaneity, intuition, instinct, and attenuated personal agency" (18), then women, themselves associated with all of these qualities, might claim it for their own. Such connections allow Olwell to make new sense out of novels that celebrate feminine power in such terms, as well as others that are more skeptical. Louisa May Alcott's *Work* (1873), for example, shows the direct influence of Emerson (an Alcott family friend) in its portrayal of a young woman who leaps up on a "sudden and uncontrollable impulse" (qtd. in Olwell 33) to address a group of women workers, her inspirational rhetoric fusing them at a stroke into a self-aware collective. In contrast, Henry James's portrayal of the magnetic feminist speaker Verena, in *The Bostonians* (1886), as spoken through by forces outside her contributes to a suspicion of the young woman as no more than a puppet in the service of other people's ends.

For Olwell, such a depiction merely makes evident James's unease in the face of the promiscuous merger of public and private, specificity and generality, or autonomy and dependence, which for her formed the very promise of genius discourse for feminist critique. Yet how comes it that we turn out to have been so wrong about genius in the first place? Was it really wrong to associate it with the unencumbered, impregnable individual? In addressing these questions, Olwell makes one of her most important interventions. She reminds us that, despite a tendency to conflate them as discourses of modern individualism, liberalism and Romanticism brought selfhood to the fore in different and indeed often deeply opposed ways. To understand feminism's interest in the Romantic category of genius, we need to recognize how "the split and possessed self of the Romantic model confounds the autonomous selfhood of liberal democracy, rendering it an impoverished reduction" (18).

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This account remembers, in other words, that, unlike liberalism, Romanticism represented a *critique* of modernity from within. Georg Simmel once termed the two modes of individualism that resulted the "quantitative" and the "qualitative": one based on equality and a solidity of self, the other on difference and the ceaseless flux of feeling. Olwell's understanding of genius talk's tie to the latter of these enables her to grasp how it could fuel a more affectively charged, improvisational, utopian vision of democratic politics "based on inspiration, collectivity, and magical permutations of agency" (6). Clearly, we see such a vision in both *Work* and *The Bostonians,* and in her two strongest chapters Olwell shows its continuing influence on early twentieth-century American women's writing as well.

While focused around the neglected work of the novelist and activist Mary Hunter Austin—particularly her 1912 *Künstlerroman, A Woman and a Genius*—Olwell's fourth chapter really provides a rich extended cultural portrait of an entire era too often neglected in American literary scholarship: the early decades of the twentieth century prior to the full-fledged advent of modernism. Although Olwell does not pursue such a tack, this period could easily be read as a remarkably vital one for Romantically rather than sentimentally inflected women's fiction of the sort that motivates her study, from Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* through Willa Cather's *Song of the Lark* or any number of New Woman novels from both sides of the Atlantic. Working against sexological theories like Havelock Ellis's that positioned woman as the "race type" and man as the variation (whether genius or criminal), these books portrayed female artist figures struggling with a desire for self-expression that often appears as a strange burden imposed upon them. And yet as writers, singers, or actresses, they, too, like Alcott's Christie, become not simply isolated selves but conduits through which other women can project their own desires for similar acts of self-transformation (155).

This chapter also addresses how the genius talk underlying Austin's project becomes increasingly problematic, from a progressive point of view, by the modernist era. Although Austin's portrayal of genius as a kind of endless potentiality and variability links it to the democratic project, it also, by the time of her self-help book *Everyman's Genius* (1925), suggests the term's assimilability to more quietist therapeutic and consumerist logics of abundance. Genius, in short, becomes a commodity—and, indeed, one perhaps more available to some than to others. As Olwell goes on to show, Austin's later work falls prey to what Olwell argues is a period-

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specific tendency to understand genius in racial and national terms, as the possession of a genetically linked people rather than of either an anomalous individual or an ad hoc collectivity. More attention to the long history of this tendency, as in the work of Herder, might have helped make better sense out of the complexities of its turn-of-the-century appeal (to figures like W. E. B. Du Bois among others). As Olwell does note, however, once more mystical notions of racial genius were often now imagined anew in more purportedly scientific terms.

Unsurprisingly, then, Olwell in the equally excellent chapter that follows shows the Harlem Renaissance writer Jessie Fauset writing a more parodic version of the genius novel from an African-American point of view. Beginning with a youthful heroine steeped in the already established exceptionalist genre of "great black Americans," and pondering how she could possibly form part of such a legacy, Fauset's *There Is Confusion* (1924), in Olwell's beautifully nuanced reading, ends up reimagining creative production as part of an ongoing elaboration of shared forms and themes—here, young girls' street songs and dances. As a result, the racialized split between white "originality" and African-American "imitativeness" can no longer be maintained.

It is at this point that Olwell arrives at the figure without whom no account of women and genius could be complete, Gertrude Stein. Stein's professions of her own inhabitation of the category as an artistic innovator remains, after all, legendary. For contemporary critics, however, such professions tend more often to be read in relation to the political dilemmas engendered by Stein's life and work—most damningly, her wartime ties to collaborationists in Vichy France. As Olwell powerfully argues, however, the very scholarly desire for a figure like Stein to float free of messy political exigencies (and the concomitant dismay when she fails to do so) could itself be seen as the legacy of genius discourse, with its continued dream of a "superabundant agency" on the part of an idealized artist figure. The difference, Olwell notes, is that we now typically imagine that agency in political rather than aesthetic terms.

This seems a remarkably trenchant point, in its acknowledgment of the enduring appeal of Romantic notions of subjectivity and, indeed, of Romantic rather than liberal construals of politics in particular. Years ago, Winfried Fluck made a similar point about the initial move toward new historicism in American studies, suggesting that critics who imagined themselves to be undermining individualism *tout court* often simply replaced a liberal selfhood (based on self-restraint and older notions of "character") with a Romantic "expressive individualism" (215) that tied

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psychic forms of liberation to political ones. While current trends such as affect theory may be more fully committed to a "post-individual" framework, their fascination with an aestheticized realm of pure, nonrational potentiality (now conceived of as prior to social inhibition rather than as a divestiture of it) could easily be viewed as part of the same genealogy—particularly when we take into account Olwell's reminders of the transindividual dimension of Romanticism.[2]

The theorization Olwell offers of the genius figure, however, remains compelling precisely for its ability to destabilize more simply celebratory Romanticisms that uphold either an idealized self-expression or an idealized "will of the people," but rarely both. As Olwell shows, once cast in the more dialectical terms typical of genius talk in the writers she explores—with their oscillations between "autonomy and dependence, the private and the public, and particularity and universality"—Romantic subjectivity reattains its critical capacity to pressure the limits not simply of liberalism (which might be understood as a utopian *conflation* of self and collectivity, where each forms itself seamlessly in relation to the other) but of versions of Romanticism itself that imagine that dialectic merely resolvable into one or the other of its poles.

For some recent theorists of modernity, such as Josef Früchtl and the Marxist critics Frederick Löwy and Robert Sayre, this means Romanticism should be thought of less as a discrete historical epoch than as an ongoing counter-discourse to modern liberalism, one for which literary works form a central but not sufficient archive. Another such archive might be what was once called "theory." Olwell comes closest to reckoning with this possibility when she confronts a 2004 text by Julia Kristeva which, in a manner strangely akin to Olwell's historical examples, muses on "feminine genius" with reference to the work of Hannah Arendt, Colette, and Melanie Klein, defining it as "'the breakthrough that consists in going beyond the situation'" (qtd. in Olwell 19). As Olwell writes, clearly with some wonder, Kristeva apparently conceives this category as "an actually existing conceptual resource" (19) for imagining what freedom might look like. As she hastens to explain, she herself will explore, rather, "how and why *the idea* of female genius" (20) served feminist ends at a particular moment in history. She thus sees her project as sharing most with Gustavus Stadler's work on how genius talk, as he describes it, "was ultimately most useful for rendering, on a mass scale, the consumption of aesthetic culture as a necessary and vital part of the 'freedom' known as good citizenship" (10).

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Yet Olwell risks selling herself short here, it seems to me. *The Genius of Democracy* is an unusually strong first book not simply for its originality of focus, its creation of an exciting new archive, and the consistent lucidity and finesse of its textual analyses. It is, further, to be commended precisely for how it does *not* merely take a category associated with aesthetic value and historicize it into submission as part of an ideological project for instilling "freedom," with scare quotes firmly attached. Indeed, note how in Stadler's formation genius discourse turns out simply to bolster *liberal* subjectivity—"good citizenship"—after all. This is a far cry from Olwell's Romantic dialectic, in which genius "breaks the frame of normative constructions of democracy in a manner we need to observe and might come to value" (31) even as we also acknowledge the serious problems it poses. Thus framing her project in the future tense, Olwell, not so differently from Kristeva, imagines that her archive might meaningfully outlive the moment that initially generated it. In this sense, almost despite its own intents, *The Genius of Democracy* itself goes "beyond the situation" of contemporary historicist criticism.

Notes

1. See Susan Cain.

2. See, for example, Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth, and Brian Massumi.

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Modernism's Mythic Pose: Gender, Genre, Solo Performance
by Carrie J. Preston
Oxford University Press, 2011. 357 pages

Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter

Carrie J. Preston's *Modernism's Mythic Pose* merits high praise for the breadth and depth of Preston's research, the range of content she covers, and the insights she provides on topics and issues relevant to cultural studies in general and to specific fields such as dance, theater, literature, philosophy, and history. Many of the developments and connections she explores have either been ignored in previous academic studies or dealt with superficially. That said, Preston's book does have some problems with clarity and documentation. I will begin with an introduction to the book's focus, including discussion of Delsarte and "Delsartism" and a survey of the chapters; then relate Preston's research to other current Delsarte studies; and end with a brief discussion of some of the problems in the work. On the subject of clarity, it would have been useful if Preston had provided a short identification and time frame with her first reference to each person she discusses as well as to each named author of a source to which she refers. She provides that information for some, but not for others, apparently assuming that all readers are familiar with figures such as Isadora Duncan, Ezra Pound, Charlotte Mew, H.D., et.al., which is not necessarily true with an interdisciplinary study such as this one. Such information would also provide the reader with insight into Preston's understanding and valuation of each artist's work and significance.

Scholars of modern literature may not be familiar with François Delsarte (1811-1871) whose work and its subsequent adaptations (often termed "Delsartism") are central to this book's conception and realization. Delsarte was a performing artist (a singer) and a noted teacher of acting, singing, declamation, and aesthetics in Paris. Dissatisfaction with the training he received as a young singing student at the Paris Conservatory led Delsarte to explore the fields of vocal and physical expression, and he developed a complex theoretical system as the foundation of his practical approach to performance and to training actors, singers, and orators. While some of Delsarte's French students continued his work, it was his only

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known American student, James Steele Mackaye (1842-1894), who, along with his own students and colleagues in the United States, developed and significantly added to Delsarte's theory and practice (see Ruyter). Preston identifies Delsarte as "a French performance theorist" and writes that "benefitting from assumptions of French cultural authority, Delsartism designated a varied set of international movements that were particularly popular between 1880 and 1920" (4). Unfortunately, she gives no details about the locations of these "international movements" or their individual characteristics—or to whom she is attributing "assumptions of French cultural authority." What she seems to be referring to here and in most of her other discussions of "Delsartism" is the adaptations of Delsarte's work that developed in the United States from the 1870s on and can be termed "American Delsartism" (Ruyter 22, 57-66). Some of those adaptations eventually found their way to Europe in the early twentieth century—mainly to Germany and Russia, but to other areas as well. Preston does mention Delsartism in Germany (90), and she discusses more fully the arrival of Delsartean theories and practices in Russia beginning in 1903 and their subsequent influence on Russian film (91-99).

As indicated by her somewhat humorous title, *Modernism's Mythic Pose,* Preston's purpose is to investigate and understand aspects of the "old" in relation to what is considered and/or has been identified as "new" or "modern." She believes that confusion about terms relating to modernism has contributed "to an overemphasis on the new that marginalizes mythic poses and solos, long histories of performance genres and bodily techniques, the ways modern subject positions use old ones, and other continuities with earlier periods," and she states that her "book's commitment" is "to examining what is not new in modernism" (9). This is a worthy goal, but given the terminological ambiguity she acknowledges, it would be useful to know what she means by "modern," "modernism," "old," "new," etc.—if she has one meaning for each term or different meanings in different contexts. Throughout the book, Preston seems to assume that the meaning of such terms will be clear to the reader, but often it is not (at least to this reader).

Preston's introduction provides an overview of the breadth and depth of her investigation of the figures, movements, topics, and issues that she treats more fully in the five chapters that follow. In the section "Modern, Antimodern, and Mythic Posing" she introduces F. T. Marinetti, Isadora Duncan, H.D., François Delsarte, Delsartism, and Vernon Lee and pro-

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vides a summary of each chapter's contents. In "Gendered Identity and Embodiment" she focuses on gender issues in relation to the performance practices of Delsarteans, Duncan, and others; and in "Biblical Typology and Classical Ritual" she discusses Dante Alighieri, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, T. S. Eliot, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Jane Ellen Harrison in relation to that double theme. As one would expect, "Solo Genres" makes reference to various types of solo performance related to Preston's overall focus; and "Modernist Kinesthetics" includes information about Rudolf Laban, Vernon Lee, Ezra Pound, and others in a discussion of the potential for kinesthetic responses to stationary forms such as literature as well as to moving forms such as dance—a response in the body as well as in the mind and emotions of a reader, viewer, or audience member experiencing the work.

In Chapter 1, "The Solo's Origins: Monodramas, Attitudes, Dramatic Monologues," Preston relates "Delsartism" to the solo performance forms named in the title (she uses "attitudes" and "statue posing" interchangeably). She also considers the movement's connection to artists and works such as Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) and his melodrama *Pygmalion* (1762), Emma Lyon Hamilton (1765-1815) and her statue-posing, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) and his melodrama *Proserpina* of 1815, Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861) and the poses and gestures to which she refers in her poetry and that Preston can imagine being performed, and the poets Christina Rossetti (1830-1894) and Augusta Webster (1837-1894).

Preston writes that Chapter 2, "Posing Modernism: Delsartism in Modern Dance and Silent Film," "focuses on Delsartean theories of the body" (58). The first section, "Delsarte's Aesthetics of the Attitude" includes information about Delsarte's life, his and others' writings on the system, his theory, and the spread of Delsartism in the United States and Europe. The second, "Disseminating Delsarte," provides information on Mackaye, who first brought the Delsarte theory and what I designate as the "Delsarte-Mackaye" practice (Ruyter 21) to the United States, and discusses the work of Henrietta Hovey (1849-1918) and other American Delsarteans. The third section, "Performing Delsartism: Genevieve Stebbins and the Early Motions of Modern Dance," provides information about Stebbins (1857-1933 or later) whom Preston correctly identifies as "the most influential American Delsartean" (73) because of her teaching, performing, and publications. The fourth section, "Performing Delsartism

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(Take Two): Denishawn and Hollywood," discusses the influence of Delsartism on noted dance innovators Ruth St. Denis (1879-1968) and Ted Shawn (1891-1972) and the impact of their work in the film industry. The final section, "The Russian Delsarte: Kuleshov and Film Montage" focuses on the work of the Russian filmmaker and theorist, Lev Kuleshov (1899-1970).

Preston's discussion of Stebbins in particular demonstrates the problems that arise through her failure to define the term "modern." Preston never indicates what she means by the term "modern dance," which she uses in the title of Chapter 2 and its section on Stebbins. But this term, like others related to modernism, is ambiguous. It can be understood as dance that is "modern" as opposed to "old" or "traditional," but it is usually used to designate that genre of concert dance and dance technique that began in the 1920s with the independent work of innovators such as Martha Graham, and that continues today—a genre comparable to that of ballet, for example. Earlier concert dance innovators such as Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, and Ted Shawn are sometimes referred to as "pre-modern" or "first generation modern," but Stebbins—whose work influenced Duncan and the others, but preceded their twentieth-century explorations—would not be considered in that category at all.

Chapter 3, "Positioning Genre: The Dramatic Monologue in Cultures of Recitation," begins with a section on one of the foremost American specialists in elocution, Samuel Silas Curry (1847-1921), with attention to some of his fourteen publications on various aspects of expression, including the dramatic monologue, the role of American Delsartism in his theory and practice, Curry's influence as a leader in the developing field of expression and its training methods, and connections between his work and those of others in the fields of expression and elocution in both England and the United States. As Preston notes in her introduction, this chapter also "situates Charlotte Mew, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and Amy Lowell in relation to the cultures of recitation that ushered in modernism" (10).

The revolutionary concert dance artist Isadora Duncan (1877-1927) is the focus of Preston's fourth chapter, "The Motor in the Soul: Isadora Duncan's Solo Dance." Near the beginning of this chapter, Preston writes that "Duncan's attempt to make dance 'new' by turning back to a mythical past brought Delsartean statue posing into a hybrid performance form: a combination of solo dance, live orchestral music (usually romantic), non-

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naturalistic stage decor, and inflammatory curtain-call speeches" (144). She discusses Duncan's performance practice and writings in relation to concepts of tradition and modernism and to the works of writers and thinkers such as Walt Whitman (1819-1892), Ernst Haeckl (1834-1919), and Friedrich Nietszche (1844-1900), figures outside of the dance field whom Duncan considered her "dance masters" (160). Preston stresses the image of the "motor" in this artist's work by opening the section with a quotation from Duncan's autobiography in which she states "Before I go out on the stage, I must place a motor in my soul . . . if I do not get time to put the motor in my soul, I cannot dance" (144). Preston frequently returns to this concept of the motor and relates Duncan's innovations in dance to three abilities she (Preston) attributes to motors: "to move several objects simultaneously," "to channel forces and move a foreign object," and to engage in "endless repetition" (146). Preston devotes three sections of the chapter to these "abilities" in relation to Duncan's dance: Section IV, "The Multiplied Body of the Motor"; Section V, "Motorized Propulsion and Modernist Ritual"; and Section VI, "Repetitions of the Motor: Will and Spontaneity."

The final section of Preston's chapter on Duncan is titled "The Weight of a Thigh and the 'New Woman' of Modernism," and focuses on the dancer's significance in relation to political and feminist issues. Unfortunately Preston opens this section with a quotation that arguably misrepresents Duncan's views on these issues. She writes, "Disputing what she identified as one of the myths of motherhood, that giving birth is a universally joyful experience, she [Duncan] declares, 'Don't let me hear of any Woman's Movement or Suffrage Movement until women have put an end to this, I believe, wholly useless agony'" (182). Preston seems to think that this indicates that Duncan was totally against women's suffrage. In fact, the quotation comes from a passage in Duncan's autobiography, *My Life* (142), but it is not a statement or argument about women's movements or a declaration against childbirth. Rather it is part of Duncan's description of the dire and endless pain she suffered in the process of giving birth and her belief that the pain of childbirth was "useless agony" which should be alleviated with medication just as other kinds of pain would be. However, as Preston discusses in the rest of this section, Duncan did reject the women's and suffragist's movements as being too narrow in relation to what she believed should be the goals of women's liberation and the discarding of traditional restraints.

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Preston's final chapter, "Ritualized Reception: H.D.'s Antimodern Poetics and Cinematics," features the poet and performing artist Hilda Doolittle (1886-1961). Preston summarizes H.D.'s work as follows:

> Mythic performance is a pliant rubric that can encompass her dramatic monologues, verse drama, film theory, acting, and long poems, all of which look back to prior genres and subjectivities so as to gaze more directly on modernity. An antimodern critique unites her work: the search for a mode of being that unites body and soul and the use of myth to encourage readers and audiences to participate in a similar search. (191)

The introduction and seven sections of this chapter discuss H.D. in relation to antimodern concepts, Delsartean theory, Hellenism, Imagism, ritual traditions, the ancient Greek chorus, dance, film, and her dramatic monologues. While H.D. may or may not have ever seen Isadora Duncan dance, it is interesting that she owned a copy of Duncan's autobiography and had underlined passages in it (194).

In her afterword, Preston sums up the vast array of information and discussion she has provided in the book, notes a previous "critical neglect of Delsartism and other antimodern movements within modernist studies" (239), and mentions the work of "post-modernists" such as the innovative theater director Jerzy Grotowski and the ground-breaking dancer and choreographer Yvonne Rainer (247)—among others—who are continuing some of the work she has discussed.

As it happens, there has been a welcome reversal of what Preston terms the "critical neglect" of Delsartism. Soon after her book was issued in 2011, there were three conferences in honor of the 200-year anniversary of Delsarte's birth in November 1811. The first was held at the Akademie für gesprochenes Wort in Stuttgart, Germany, on November 10-15, and the second in Paris, at the Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art and the Centre National de la Danse, on November 18-20. A third took place in Padua in December 2011. I participated in the Stuttgart and Paris conferences, and at each there was a broad range of research presented on Delsarte; his students and followers; and Delsartean theory and practice in relation to such subjects as theater, music, physical culture, dance, Russian theater and film, and teaching. Some of the presenters were authors of articles in the 2004-2005 *Mime Journal* who have been continuing their research, while others had recently embarked on Del-

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sartean research. There were also practical workshops given by presenters who are applying Delsartean theory and practice to their teaching of a variety of dance and movement forms. In addition to these events, a book edited by the organizer of the Paris conference, Franck Waille (author of a 2009 doctoral dissertation on Delsarte), was published in Paris in 2011. This book contains essays by well-known Delsarte scholars such as Waille, Alain Porte, Elena Randi, and others. What has been lacking amidst this outpouring of scholarship is the investigation and discussion of Delsartean theory and practice in relation to many of the people, practices, and topics that Preston addresses, which makes her work a very welcomed addition to knowledge about Delsarte and his heritage.

As I stated at the beginning of this review, there are problems in the book, with both the content and the documentation. I've discussed some of the problems with content and clarity above. A serious problem with the documentation is that, for sources that are referred to more than once, Preston writes in the note of the first citation, "Henceforth cited in the text as . . . . ." with a shortened version of the title, such as "Lee," "CWR," "See," "FB," "Hour," "Sun," etc. There are 173 such abbreviations. While there is no problem when the author's name is in the text preceding such a reference, in something between 100 and 200 cases, the author is not mentioned, and the reader must scan previous notes to determine what Preston is citing. Other problems with the use and presentation of sources include the following: sources are not provided for some information, some source information is presented incorrectly,[1] a large number of pages is sometimes given for a short passage with one or more quoted phrases, and some sources cited in the text or the notes do not appear in the bibliography.

I commend Preston for the rigorous research she has done in a broad range of published writings and archives, and for her practical work in researching Isadora Duncan—including participating in classes at Lori Belilove's Isadora Duncan Dance Foundation in New York City. She has amassed fascinating and illuminating information about the components that embody Delsartean concepts or practices in the work of a range of important figures in the arts, literature, philosophy, and particularly, performance forms. Has she achieved her goal of investigating "what is not new in modernism" (9) and bringing to light aspects of the "old" in the "new" in the theory, practice, and heritage of Delsarte and Delsartism? I would say yes, despite some of the problems with her book. Her insights

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are probing and stimulating, and she opens the reader's eyes and mind to practices and connections that were not previously noted or known. I would highly recommend this book to anyone interested in the topics Preston addresses.

Note

1. Note 17 on p. 294, for example, gives an incorrect page number for the passage to which it refers on p. 146. There are other instances of this kind of error.

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Pinks, Pansies, and Punks: The Rhetoric of Masculinity in American Literary Culture
by James Penner
Indiana University Press, 2011. 297 pages

Yetta Howard

It now goes without saying that studies of American literary culture should attend to gender, and that masculinity has a particularly vexed relationship to American identity. Embedded in the modern cultural imaginary are steadfast images of normative male identities that have perpetuated and reinforced the rugged masculinity and illusion of impenetrability that define the U.S. in particular and the West in general. Yet, too often in histories of literature, its authors, and its associated cultural milieus, critics give cursory treatment to—or even outright ignore—how prevailing impressions of the writers' bodies themselves have shaped the way literary works have been understood in the context of dominant political ideologies of gender. In his comprehensive study of the gendered contours of American cultural production, *Pinks, Pansies and Punks: The Rhetoric of Masculinity in American Literary Culture,* James Penner calls attention to this critical blind spot and, in response, emphasizes the importance of locating how constructions of masculinity, perceptions of the male body, and ethnic, racial, and sexual differences have informed the work of male authors. For instance, in a complex discussion of the tensions between the Old Left and the 1960s countercultural movement, Penner moves "beyond the traditional interpretation by foregrounding gender concerns and specifically [focuses] on how generational attitudes about maleness dramatically collide and how the so-called lifestyle differences are a reflection of opposing masculine sensibilities" (164). Penner's study thus offers a new direction in scholarship about the ways that the bodies of writers are reflected in and through their work. In Penner's own words, his book demonstrates how "the American literary text is indelibly marked by the body type that produces it" (8).

Throughout, Penner provides a classification of body types in relation to literary genres, political movements, and the reception of works by a variety of male writers and cultural icons. He begins with the "hypermasculine ideal" (23) and its connections to 1930s hard-boiled fiction, moves

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to the "stigmatization of effeminacy" (23) in response to cultural production of the 1940s, and then shows how fears of "feminine contamination" as well as the U.S.'s risk of "penetration" by the U.S.S.R. aligned with homophobic rhetoric in the 1950s, which was also a formative period of youth cultures. From there Penner explores the evolution of these cultures in terms of a "critique of aggressive masculinity and the rigidity of the hard body" (24) in the 1960s and ends with 1960s and 1970s countercultural and political contexts that both sustained and dismantled notions of normative masculine embodiment. A striking quality of Penner's study is its attention to the very visible ways that American culture has been historically conceived in terms of gender taxonomies. Named after Senator Joseph McCarthy's public rebuke of "homosexual and affluent left-wingers who supported the New Deal" (246) in the 1950s, *Pinks, Pansies, and Punks* addresses the period from the 1930s through the 1970s, a series of decades that lend themselves to understanding the relationship between a typology of masculinities and their concomitant political affiliations. Penner arranges the book's chapters in chronological order, allowing the reader to group movements—both literary and political—according to the emerging discourses of gender in each era. In doing so, Penner works through an enormous amount of cultural material as it specifically pertains to changing conceptions of masculinity from the Depression era through the late-twentieth-century feminist resurgence.

Indeed, one of the truly remarkable aspects of the book is not so much Penner's distinctive ability to shore up large amounts of information and strip it down to its most fascinating and important components, but the way he leads the reader through the details and aesthetic intricacies of the material analyzed. While *Pinks, Pansies, and Punks* takes literary culture as its focus, Penner rightly shows us that literary culture need not be limited to novels. Rather, the book presents a refreshing range of material such as medical and scientific studies, letters, reviews, essays, and items from popular culture. Toward the end of the book, Penner's attention to a wider definition of literature becomes even more pronounced as he describes a post-1960s moment in American literary culture characterized by "a distinct movement away from the primacy of the literary text in American intellectual culture in favor of disparate cultural forms that provide means of modifying consciousness and subverting rationality" (176). This is a significant statement that both identifies a historical shift and relates it to Penner's own methodology.

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Therefore, it makes sense that Penner employs a combination of critical frameworks that correspond with the scope of the project. Penner explains his methodology—which combines queer studies, literary history, ethnic studies, psychoanalysis, and feminist approaches, among others—as follows: "My theoretical eclecticism is a tactical choice that is based on the premise that previous scholarship on specific literary authors has been hindered by the attempt to see literature through the prism of one particular critical approach" (20). In approaching the material in this way, Penner provides a nuanced and necessary way to move beyond traditional disciplinary orthodoxies that fall short of accounting for the varied dimensions of the material they analyze. What results is a multifaceted project that is invested in providing an unrestrained intellectual and cultural history of masculinity—one that does not succumb to the strictures of disciplinarity and canonicity in which largely historical- and literary-focused studies sometimes get trapped.

The book begins by introducing its primary paradigm for theorizing twentieth-century conceptions of masculinity: the hard-soft binary. Going so far as to provide a chart in the introduction that outlines the specificities of hardness versus softness—with hardness including concepts such as "rational," "aggressive, "reticent" and softness comprising notions like "emotionally open," "expressive," and "pliable/malleable" (16)—Penner further relates hardness and softness to Nietzsche's characterizations of the Apollonian masculine and Dionysian feminine. Ultimately, however, Penner turns to Nietzsche not to undergird but to complicate his binary categories, proposing concepts such as the "Dionysian masculine" to describe one way that gender is disarticulated from the bodies to which it is thought to be ascribed: "When the mythic cultural feminine is transferred to the masculine body, the implication is that the male body becomes porous and capable of being penetrated, and this conception is not limited to a sexual act" (13). For Penner, this expansive construing of penetration becomes a manner of reading how the figure of the male body operates vis-à-vis textual production.

Along these lines, Penner does not simply relate hardness to notions of tumescence, but employs it as a corporeal lens through which to explain larger biases and anxieties that surrounded the work of American male writers and the political contexts in which they worked. For example, the book's second chapter, on the 1940s, discusses the ways in which the word *penetration* was used in anti-Communist rhetoric. George Ken-

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nan, the diplomat who, during the emergence of the Cold War, authored US containment policy (which was grounded, as its name suggests, in the containment of Soviet influence), conceived the U.S.S.R. as a threatening penetrator. This led to the gendering of prevailing conceptions of the U.S., with "the state of imperviousness becom[ing] a central tenet of US foreign policy" and Kennan urg[ing] policy makers to "tighten" up and act with "cohesion, firmness, and vigor" (68). In this case, the gendered metaphors even suggest that the national body must protect itself from the frightening prospect of anal rape. Here, the conflation of the era's conservative political views about its cold war opponent with the intimation of non-normative sexualities speaks to dominant, if implicit, fears about homosexuality and the feminizing of the male body.

Making similar use of anxieties about penetration, the book's fourth chapter, on the 1960s, outlines the ongoing masculinism of that era. This chapter includes a discussion of Leslie Fiedler's essay "The New Mutants," which systematically admonished the "softening" of the American male alongside the budding countercultural movements that were largely defined in terms of illicit drug use and open sexuality: "Fiedler contends that the surrender of consciousness to a mind-altering substance is a feminine act because it necessitates the act of vacating rationality" (162). Penner goes on to point out how Fiedler's warning about the feminization of American culture hinges on a desire to protect an increasingly outmoded masculine Western humanist tradition against contamination by the feminine.

Many of these anxieties, as Penner shows, can be detected at earlier moments in American culture. The book's first chapter, on the 1930s, provides a history of how the feminine-coded genteel tradition of American writing was regarded with disdain by reviewers such as Michael Gold, who sought to expose what he thought of as the latent homosexuality of other writers by critiquing their decorous language. Gold's leftist criticism, which advocated that writing and art be utilitarian rather than merely aesthetic (32), reflects a larger cultural sentiment about artistic practices in the 1930s that was related to the era's economic crisis:

> It was generally believed that conspicuous consumption and leisure culture have a feminizing effect on the upper classes; thus, leisure culture inevitably produces overcivilized men who lack vitality and virility, traits the working class possesses in abun-

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> dance. In Gold's literary criticism, the images of conspicuous consumption and extravagance are quickly attached to a mythical idle homosexual . . . [who] does not produce wealth or offspring, but lives only for idleness, pleasure, and beauty. Thus, the homosexual is a parvenu, an upper-class phenomenon and the degenerate product of a corrupt economic system. (30)

This connection between homosexuality and ornate styles of writing associated with Oscar Wilde and Marcel Proust had a sustained effect on how literary texts were read as specifically gendered and classed. Penner sheds new light on such connections by demonstrating how the casting of cultural production as feminine relied on viewing writing as a direct extension of queer and upper-class bodies themselves.

Nonetheless, in Chapter 3, on the 1950s, Penner demonstrates how some of these connections emerge as contradictory, in particular in the writings of T. S. Eliot. While Eliot's often-cited essay "Tradition and Individual Talent" becomes a staple text for the New Critics in the 1950s who were "concerned with masculinizing literature by connecting it to the rational disciplines of the academy" (133), his use of putatively feminine imagery and his affinity for sentiment made his work vulnerable to to the notion that poetry—and the poet—are inextricably linked to effeminacy, even if Eliot attempted to head off such assumptions by proposing a masculinized process of writing poetry (140).

As the above example demonstrates, *Pinks, Pansies, and Punks* makes a concerted effort to move beyond tired interpretations of authors' biographies and garden-variety close textual analysis. Charting the significance of lesser-studied aspects of literary culture, the book includes innovative readings of some of the most recognized literary icons and countercultural figures. For instance, Penner emphasizes the ways that James Dean's character "embodies the entire spectrum of hard and soft masculinity" (116) and how *Rebel Without a Cause* speaks to bad sex role modeling. Penner also presents Timothy Leary, the Harvard professor who is well-known for his advocacy of LSD, in a new way, addressing Leary's account of having sex while being under the influence of psilocybin as an example of the emergence of alternative masculinities in the 1960s: "When describing the sexual encounter, Leary omits the masculine theme of aggressive penetration and instead uses aquatic language . . . that emphasizes the supple and jelly-like qualities of his reborn masculine body and self" (182). Penner

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further discusses Allen Ginsberg, known for his subcultural presence and the controversy that surrounded the publication in 1956 of his explicitly homoerotic *Howl*, in the context of his radical, proto-punk, anti-striptease performance art: "Ginsberg's incorporation of the feminine—the object of the male gaze—disrupts the narrative of the striptease and does violence to the traditional categories of masculine and feminine by creating an ephemeral moment of gender blurriness" (145). Significantly, Penner's attention to lesser-known details about these cultural producers allows him to re-think them in terms of their importance to a larger understanding of shifting mid-century gender paradigms.

Penner also provides cultural histories of concepts such as "hard-boiled" and "egghead" in the 1940s and unpacks the 1950s dichotomy between the "hipster" and the "square," linking these concepts to race and other categories that intersected with gender. Penner thus notes that, "in racial terms, the square is usually white" (100), and describes how the egghead becomes "a new term for the liberal intellectual" (95). While these terms have been widely circulated in describing "types" of masculinity, Penner brings to them a new attention to the stakes of masculinity's role in American cultural history. While isolating these "types" is a fresh approach to understanding constructions of mid-century masculinity, Penner's book is in conversation with critics such as Robert Corber, who has written about those who "deviated from the dominant norms of masculinity and femininity risk[ing] construction as unAmerican" (Corber 302) in the McCarthy witch-hunts of the 1950s, and Lee Edelman, whose essay "Tearooms and Sympathy, or, The Epistemology of the Water Closet" explores Cold War-era anxieties about non-heterosexual male bodies.

Penner takes care to avoid the danger, inherent in any study of masculinity and male literary cultural production broadly construed, of unintentionally reinforcing, through selective attention, the very masculinist emphases it sets out to analyze. He writes, for instance, "I offer the hard/soft binary as a tool for identifying and deconstructing the popular gender myths that exist within Anglo-American literary culture. My hope is that it will not be used to reify existing gender stereotypes" (250, n19). Along these lines, Penner devotes particular attention to the way that masculine ideals associated with forms of liberation in the 1960s obliquely and explicitly reinforced discriminatory and exclusionary practices. For example, The Living Theater's promotion of sexual liberation created, some argued, a hostile environment for female audience members and participants

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(205), while Eldridge Cleaver, in his involvement with the Black Panther Party, made use of homophobic rhetoric in outlining a racialized notion of phallic masculinity (216).

The only thing missing from Penner's thoroughly engaging book is, perhaps, a discussion of masculinity as it relates to the emergence of punk rock in the late 1970s. Although the "punk" in Penner's title refers to something else—a derogatory term parallel to "faggot" or "sissy"—it would seem that the (male) figure of the punk, punk culture's circulation of fanzines, and its heavily aggressive masculine culture would have a place in the book. Yet Penner refers to this culture only in passing, suggesting that Allen "Ginsberg's brash and confrontational style often resembles the punk rock aesthetic of the late 1970s" (146). Given his discussion of James Dean, gay clones, and the anti-establishment practices of the Beats, it is curious that Penner does not include punk culture as an important extension of alternative masculinity and as, in many ways, a reinscription of earlier forms of gendered dissidence. What Penner does provide is an epilogue that suggests that hard masculinity remains appealing in the contemporary era, showing up for instance in popular conceptions about masculinity and its relationship to public office that helped shape the Bush-Kerry and McCain-Obama presidential contests of the past decade (247). Overall, *Pinks, Pansies, and Punks* offers an indispensable text that compellingly theorizes the significance of masculinity's role in literary culture and the twentieth-century social contexts that shaped—and were shaped by—it.

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Nothing Flat Nothing Quite Flat

Criminal Ingenuity: Moore, Cornell, Ashbery, and the Struggle Between the Arts
by Ellen Levy
Oxford University Press, 2011. 260 pages

Deep Skin: Elizabeth Bishop and the Visual Arts
by Peggy Samuels
Cornell University Press, 2010. 239 pages

Phoebe Putnam

In January of last year, *New Yorker* critic Peter Schjeldahl took aim at *enfant terrible* Damien Hirst's candy-colored spot paintings (currently being shown in aggregate as "The Complete Spot Paintings, 1986-2011" in New York, London, Paris, Geneva, Rome, Athens, Hong Kong, and Beverly Hills):

> The result is art in the way that some exotic financial dealings are legal: by a whisker. Just as no law forbids the sale of bundled credit-default swaps on bundled subprime mortgages, no agreed-on aesthetic principle invalidates paintings that are churned out by proxy and then bid up at auction as fungible commodities. The "Why" in such matters comes down to a historic, all-purpose, great "Why not?" A sense of frictionless impunity must be exciting if you're on the supply side of the economy and the culture. If you aren't, it feels wrong. (84)

Lacking recourse to an "agreed-on aesthetic principle," Schjeldahl stops just shy of calling the Bristol-born Hirst's "grid arrangements of colored disks, in household gloss paint, on white grounds" a cut-and-dry con—though he does not restrain himself when it comes to characterizing Hirst *per se,* the infamous purveyor of diamond-bedizened skull and formaldehyde-dunk-tank of shark, as "the working-class lad who gulls the toffs and makes them like it," who "surely marvels at what he is abetted in getting away with" (85).

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Slowly but surely, flat is falling flat. Abstraction's legacy of flat surfaces, here implied by Schjeldahl as having been buffed to a perniciously "frictionless" sheen by the late twentieth century, is being read as a legacy of flat*tened,* annihilated surfaces by contemporary critics. And the history of abstraction is accordingly under fascinating review. Think of James Simpson's *Under the Hammer: Iconoclasm in the Anglo-American Tradition* (2010), which situates non-figural abstraction amidst the history of Protestantism's cyclical urge to subject figural representation to violent *dis*figuration; or of Irving Sandler's *Abstract Expressionism and the American Experience: a Reevaluation* (2009), which seeks to halt the tide of such bleak accounts. Despite their manifold and essential differences, therefore, Ellen Levy's *Criminal Ingenuity* and Peggy Samuels's *Deep Skin*—two recent studies of American poetry's constitutive relationship with mid-century abstraction—feel very much a part of our particular moment. Which is to say, the two books should be understood as having more in common than their most patent sites of contact (their interarts interdisciplinarity, their interest in sliding scales between modern and postmodern representation, their focus on poetry and the art of collage). For both Levy and Samuels are driven by a shared, fraught search that drove Schjeldahl last year to uncharacteristic aphasia. Call it the search for an "agreed-on aesthetic principle" that might distinguish the chaff of post-Cubist abstraction from its wheat.

Let us start with Levy, from whose vantage there is little wheat to be had. In *Criminal Ingenuity,* mid-century abstraction (defined as "the pure presentation of medium in and for itself that is the sine qua non of modernist art" [7] and, as such, "the privileged expression of modernism's commitment to the autonomy of art" [91]) is predominantly chaff and recurrently con, foisted upon us with disastrous consequences for American literature in general and American poetry in particular by the book's resident Cromwell, Clement Greenberg, and his "apostles of flatness" (130). The logic of this argument is obviously a polemical and unusual one in all sorts of ways. Not only does Levy place an art critic, even one as influential as Greenberg, at the center of her book's mercurial account of twentieth-century American poetry; she also explicitly defines her account as a postmortem of "history's losers" (96), calling literature, "the 'defeated' art form" (xix), and "modern poetry . . . an end-of-the-line phenomenon" (42), a "moribund artistic tradition" (34). Levy's Marianne Moore is armored, embattled, and sterile as a mule, writing poems that are

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said to exemplify "the painful, even disastrous, cost of situating oneself at the point of conflict between warring parties." Levy's John Ashbery, committed "to following the trajectory of literature . . . even, or especially, in its decline" (135), "keeps his art alive by drawing on the energies of those aspects of life that escape art: politics, sex, even the heedless dynamism of capital" (207). Sex, one "of those aspects of life that escape[s] art"? Where are we, exactly? What, in Levy's eyes, has gone so terribly wrong?

De facto sororicide, it turns out, is the story of *Criminal Ingenuity,* though the phrase "sister arts" is never uttered. If the book starts off with a deconstructionist, neo-Anzalduan infusion of geographic and geological vocabulary—"territory" (xviii), "terrain" (xviiii), "interstitial space" (xviii), "fault line," "fissure," "no-man's-land" (xxv), and, later, "borderland" (202)—it soon becomes clear that its author is not surveying the fissured terrain of American modernism as a cultural geologist, noting rifts and naturally-occurring seismic shifts. Rather, as her central pattern of language emerges—"combative stance" (28), "embattled situations" (126), "tactical move in a larger battle" (130), "enemy camp" (126), "warring parties" (34), "interregnum" (78), "internecine conflict" (210), "Mexican standoff" (117), "internal wounds" (xviii; xxix), "bloodshed" (85)—Levy reveals herself as forensic anthropologist, bent over "those rosettes / of blood on the stone floors" of The Academy and The Museum, intent on demonstrating a refined yet fatal assault against American Poetry by American Painting at mid-century, with regard to which, she suggests, our guides have not been nearly affirmative enough.[1] Her book's generative insight is that abstraction, in the hands of Greenberg, became the frictionlessly impune instrument of that assault.

"Literary" art, we recall, was what Greenberg positioned his ideas of avant-garde "abstract" art against. "Literary" art became an elastic category that included representational (figural, pictorial, spatially illusionistic) and idea-driven (narrative, historically invested, satiric or politically critical) art, art committed to the mixing of media and openly uncommitted to "areas of color arranged on a flat surface" (Ashbery, qtd. in Levy 129). Unsurprisingly, "literary" art included a lot: not only much three-dimensional work (Giacometti, for instance, gets called "literary" by Greenberg in 1946), and not only two-dimensional work indebted to three dimensions (e.g., Hopper, O'Keeffe, Tanning; surrealism, pop, photography), but also, as Levy would have it, *literature* itself. Her book begins by sketching a striking, unfamiliar portrait of early Greenberg as would-be poet, fret-

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ting in a 1939 letter (just prior to the publication of what would become his seminal "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," with "Towards a Newer Laocoon" close on its heels) that his art criticism will overshadow and extinguish his literary career: "[Once] they get the idea into their heads that I'm a critic, they'll decide—they're like that—that I'm not a poet no matter how good my poetry may be" (qtd. in Levy 2). It is a canny beginning to a canny chapter, one that trains a watchful eye on the imploding stock price of "literary" art in Greenberg's criticism as his own shares as an art critic soar.

Abstraction under "the Greenbergian regime," Levy persuades us, could be marshaled as an actively hostile instrument, a "version of art for art's sake, in which the arts" (25)—here, quoting Greenberg—"have been hunted back to their mediums, and there . . . have been isolated, concentrated and refined" (qtd. in Levy 11). This predatory "offense" line of the book's argument is powerful, particularly when Levy lets Greenberg's language—*hunted*—speak for itself. As her book progresses, however, one grows to feel that even the most convincing evidence of pre-meditation does not necessarily prove that murder, much less massacre, has been successfully carried out; at some point, one needs to see the body. Observations about current disciplinary divides or examinations of poets' laments ("poetry was declining / Painting advancing / we were complaining / it was '50" mourns Frank O'Hara on Levy's flyleaf) cannot quite appease our demand for concrete fact, a demand roused by the book's relentlessly concrete language of violence. Quantitative evidence of poetry's demise seems warranted, as does a more certain identification of the allegedly brutalized party, for that matter: "poetry" is consistently conflated not only with "literature" and "the literary" but also "narrative" and "story," while categories like "novel" or "fiction" are left largely untouched.[2] Did *they* survive the hunt?

Yet any such investigations on the part of the reader are bound to be short-lived. Terms like "poet" and "poetry" are simply asked to do too much for the reader to honor their intended scope. I question how one is to understand the term "poetry" in a study that defines the role of "the poet" as follows: "The poet's proper task, like the sociologist's, is not to referee the contest between a dominating 'I' and a dominated 'you,' but to come to the best possible understanding of the greatest possible variety of forms that 'ambition,' that is, the struggle for dominance, might take" (49). It is not that this definition is unthinkable; rather, it seems unneces-

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sarily limited. Why stop at poets and sociologists? By contrast, the terms "painter" and "painting" suffer an inverse fate, in being given too little to do, mistrusted and persistently vilified, as when Levy carelessly dismisses Newman and Rothko as interchangeable, careerist sell-outs: "When a mid-century artist like Barnett Newman or Mark Rothko hit on a signature mode of making meaningful emptiness he built on that discovery over the long term to consolidate his position within the mainstream" (93). Schjeldahl gives more credit to Damien Hirst.

The surprise of *Criminal Ingenuity* is that, despite the ubiquity of the two terms, the book is not overly interested in "painting" and "poetry" as genres in their own right, with their own internal divisions and complex histories. What the book *is* interested in, and passionately so, shifts into focus after Moore and high modernism (Chapter 2) have been left behind, in Chapters 3 (on Joseph Cornell), 4 (on Surrealism and the New York School of Poets), and 5 (on John Ashbery). Here we come to the heart of *Criminal Ingenuity,* the underlying stakes of its argument: what Levy is really championing is not poetry *per se,* but rather the most defiant, resurgent, heterogeneous forms that "literary" work, in the Greenbergian sense and under the Greenbergian gun, could take. This most "literary" of "literary" work *can* manifest as poetry, but its essential nature is not *necessarily* poetic.

Could Levy have but made this critical distinction clear, we would have been all ears, for her book is gripping when cataloguing the formally chaotic material that it describes variously, but consistently, as "mongrel forms" (14), "eccentrically organized assortments" (83), "that hybrid form, part work of art, part scholarly research, part packrat's trash, that Cornell called a 'dossier'" (103), that which Moore called "the anthology" (9), and what Ashbery, in referring to his own *Vermont Notebook,* called a "kind of messy grab bag" (qtd. in Levy 196). This criminally ingenious work, produced in the Benjaminian "limbo of 'discredit and neglect'" (qtd. in Levy xxii), is the wheat that *Criminal Ingenuity* finds amidst the chaff of post-Cubist abstraction. At its point of greatest cultural invisibility, it is work that makes most visible what those "on the supply side of the economy and the culture," those with "frictionless impunity," have rendered invisible (Schjeldahl 85). It is work that declares along with Ashbery-cum-Parmigianino in *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror,* "There is no way / to build it flat," even as he continues to paint (qtd. in Levy 190).

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When comparing apples with oranges, one wants not to overlook the fact that both are round, fist-sized fruit. Despite hemispheric, if not antipodal, differences in vantage, tone, and approach, Peggy Samuels's *Deep Skin: Elizabeth Bishop and the Visual Arts* shares with Levy's *Criminal Ingenuity* a conviction shared in turn by James Simpson, whose *Under the Hammer* credits "the flatness of the abstract surface as the cardinal sign of modernity" (34). The scholars' differences arise from the process of deciding what abstraction is, what surface is, and what all this means with respect to the visually-immersed mid-century American poets who were writing poetry in the thick of it all. Levy's view is fairly straight-forward: mid-century visual abstraction was an empress in the buff with sociopathic tendencies; the savviest mid-century artists knew it and refused to play along, knowing all the while that their refusal would cost them dearly. Given an enigmatic, sensuous title like *Deep Skin* and the phrase "in the key of pleasure" reverberating at the beginning, middle, and end of her study, we know that something quite different is on Samuels's mind (35; 102; 184). If the empress happens to be in the buff, Samuels is not at all prepared to call her a fool. For *Deep Skin* is a study that takes its cues from Elizabeth Bishop's own poetics, in determining to "[take] 'surface' seriously" (117). Make no mistake: to take surface seriously as a poet, Samuels argues, is not to capitulate to its terms, nor to bow automatically to its cachet—quite the contrary, in fact. Rather, it is to look very closely indeed at what all the fuss is about, and to ask what *can* be found there, what meaning *does* inhere in surface, what wheat *is* there, in spite of chaff, in spite of hype. And because one is a poet, it is to do more than look. It is to seek in one's writing a profound, empiric engagement with (and *within,* as counter-intuitive as that may seem) this cardinal sign of modernity, this flat, non-figural field.

If we know anything about Bishop, we know her to have been invested in the visual arts.[3] In this respect, a book subtitled "Elizabeth Bishop and the Visual Arts" would seem an inevitability. But there is little that seems inevitable about Samuels's *Deep Skin,* which is an ambitious, counter-intuitive, uncannily persuasive study that focuses on the poet's creative engagement with the paintings and line drawings of Paul Klee (Chapters 2 and 4), the collages of Kurt Schwitters (Chapter 3), and the mobiles of Alexander Calder (Chapter 5) and that, in so doing, aims right at an area of Bishop scholarship where few have ventured to go—namely, Bishop's engagement with the intellectual energies and core aesthetic

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paradigms of mid-century abstraction. If we begin with reservations about the wisdom of pursuing the comprehensive question of her book's subtitle from such an acute chronological angle, Samuels allays them, and catches our interest in the process, by making a clean, efficient case for *Deep Skin*'s sustained focus on the late thirties through the early fifties, the period in which Bishop was writing the poems that became her second volume, *A Cold Spring*.

This period has long been understood as a volatile artistic adolescence for the poet, who was struggling to differentiate herself from her high modernist influences—most famously (see "Roosters") from Marianne Moore. Bishop was to meet Robert Lowell, her closest literary peer, in 1947, and though Samuels does not make this angle of her argument explicit, she effectively asks us to reconsider the formative years in which Bishop had not yet met Lowell, and was actively searching for creative and intellectual eye contact with artists of her own generation. Emphasizing a relationship that has received comparatively little attention, Samuels begins *Deep Skin* by suggesting that Bishop found this eye contact with Margaret Miller, a painter (before the loss of her right arm) and MoMA curator, who had been Bishop's intimate at Vassar and remained such a trusted friend that in the thirties and forties, Bishop sent her every poem she wrote.[4] Reading correspondence between the two for evidence of books and articles recommended and exchanged, post-Vassar courses taken separately and together, exhibitions attended, and art purchased, Samuels makes a striking case that, at a pivotal moment in her poetic development, Bishop was exposed at unusually high levels to the currents and core questions of post-Cubist abstraction and to a transatlantic network of artists asking these questions and exploring possible solutions in their own work.

Among these currents and questions, *Deep Skin* focuses on Bishop's investment in the curious question of "depth," a classic dimension of aesthetic experience (think of having one's eye drawn down by Bruegel's steeply pitched hills and snowy roofs to the tiny cavorting ice-skaters "within" the canvas of *Hunters in the Snow,* for instance) that many a post-Cubist artist simply renounced in the wake of Cubism's radical, compelling call for the artist to attend to the surface of his or her medium as a "sensuous tactile reality" in and of itself, and its concomitant call not "to look past that surface as if it were a transparent window through which one saw the representation of an object" (Barr qtd. in Samuels 119).

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Criminal Ingenuity throws its full weight against the intellectual legitimacy of this call and the aesthetic legitimacy of any works produced in sympathy with it. *Deep Skin*, by contrast, identifies a community of post-Cubist artists—Bishop, Klee, Schwitters, and Calder in particular—who were absolutely convinced of this call's intellectual and aesthetic legitimacy; who could no longer carry on with the business of three-dimensional representation as usual; and yet who were simultaneously unwilling to "build it flat," to create work that ruled out the dimension of depth.

In a memorable discussion of "2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance," Samuels intricately explores the poem's dizzying perspectival shifts between myopic foreground and deepest background, identifying these shifts as occasioned by Bishop's conflicted double-allegiance to both surface *and* depth. Her analysis shows the post-Cubist poet to be magnetically attracted, on the one hand, to writing's tactile, typographic reality as surface, while also being unwilling, on the other, to relinquish the three-dimensional, mimetic function of writing, with its cherished capacity to hold figures and shifting, idiosyncratic, but decidedly spatio-temporal fields. Another powerful reading, of 1939's "Pleasure Seas," tracks Bishop's efforts to resolve the dichotomy between surface and depth by submerging her lyric eye *within* water's apparently flat, reflective, polished surface—seeking this flat surface's hidden human figures, its biomorphic living forms, its currents and capacity for variable temperatures and motions, and its profoundest depths. This discussion, so often revelatory, is compromised only by Samuels's determination to read the poem entirely "in the key of pleasure," without acknowledging its intense, troubled irony with respect to the "pleasure" of which it speaks.[5]

The contribution made by *Deep Skin* extends beyond that of offering us new sources and analogues, and thus its achievement and value to the field, I suggest, is not contingent upon the success of its localized arguments about the poet's relations to Klee, Schwitters, or Calder *per se*. These discussions, each departing from a sound foundation of evidence demonstrating Bishop's particular investment in the artist in question and the extent to which she sought out firsthand contact with his work, are certainly stocked with careful readings and largely persuasive connections. I myself will never read "A Cold Spring" again without seeing a "tiny Schwitters collage" in the lines

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> Beneath the light, against your white front door,
> the smallest moths, like Chinese fans,
> flatten themselves, silver and silver-gilt
> over pale yellow, orange, or gray.
> (qtd. in Samuels 190)

But what makes these lines newly resonant for me is much less a function of whether or not *Deep Skin* has convinced me that this is a Schwitterian collage-effect (though it has); and far more a function of how *Deep Skin,* at the most ambitious level of its argument, has convinced me of the utter contemporaneity of these apparently imagist lines. I am simply unable now to unsee the mid-century currents of thought (Schwitterian or no) at work and at stake in Bishop's staging of a poetic event in which biological, three-dimensional, flutteringly animate (and here Levy might add, "literary") neo-Keatsian Psyche-moths "flatten themselves," almost unrecognizably so, into something nihilistically close to "areas of color arranged on a flat surface" (qtd. in Levy 129). And yet, whereas Levy here might see literary wheat being razed to visual chaff, depth being razed to surface, Samuels asks us to note that the moths, "with their potential for flight, hint at full emergence into three dimensions," which is to say—if it is possible for Bishop's literary proxies to flatten themselves into a state of camouflaged coalescence with the flat, non-figural field, it is also possible for them to *un*flatten themselves at wont, back into the representational plane, back into nature, and to take flight from the plane of the flat (190-91).

Notes

1. The enjambed quotation is from Marianne Moore's 1917 version of "Those Various Scalpels," addressed in *Criminal Ingenuity*'s second chapter: "your cheeks, those rosettes / of blood on the stone floors of French chateaux, with regard to which the / guides are so affirmative" (qtd. in Levy 54).

2. For an example of Levy's tendency to treat "poetry" as interchangeable with such non-equivalent terms as the "literary," note how she follows Randall Jarrell's poetry-specific pronouncement in his poetry-specific 1942 essay, "The End of the Line," that "Modernism As We Know [sic] It—the most successful and influential body of *poetry* in this century—is dead" with her own

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comment that "Jarrell cannot help but notice that in the wake of the death of *literary* modernism, 'the visual arts are . . . flourishing'" (27, emphasis added). Here, as elsewhere, Levy's practice of conflation is systematic, consistently endeavoring to make the term "poetry" mean "20th-century avant-garde literature." Nor does she hesitate to denigrate all senses of "poetry" that do not meet her peculiar standard (e.g., all poetry not written in free verse), as when she makes the sweeping claim that poetic "form" is the iron grasp of "the institution" made visible: "In poetry, the framing effect of the institution has traditionally been rendered visible as form, but in the wake of the avant-garde, we no longer have access to this institutional effect, at least in its original transparency" (146-47). This line of reasoning puts her in an awkward spot when it comes to discussing John Ashbery, whose "oeuvre," she concedes, "does offer evidence of a concern with traditional form" (147).

3. Samuels's list of artists known to have been important to Bishop include "Rembrandt, Pierre Bonnard, Loren MacIver, Ben Shahn, Vincent Van Gogh, Max Ernst (for his photomontages), Honoré Daumier, Joseph Cornell, Vermeer, Eduoard Vuillard, Klee, Schwitters, Constable, Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Francis Bacon, Calder, George Seurat, Giorgio de Chirico, Oskar Kokoschka, Hyman Bloom, and John Marin" (15).

4. Miller was solely responsible for a seminal 1948 exhibition on the art of collage that Clement Greenberg called "one of the most beautiful shows of modern art ever held in this country" (qtd. in Samuels 104). One is curious to know what Levy might make of Greenberg's glowing review of the exhibition—one of the few positive reviews, as it happened. Most American critics were unmoved by the show, which wounded Greenberg on behalf of the art form, the artists, the show, and its curator; he called the exhibition's lukewarm reception "a scandal."

5. Though Samuels declares the poem to be "in the key of pleasure," the phrase "Pleasure Seas" itself appears in the context of the poem as "the shallow pleasure seas," and the poem includes such facile, sarcastic jingles as "Happy the people in the swimming-pool and on the yacht, / Happy the man in that airplane, likely as not" (Bishop 223). I do not think we are meant to believe Bishop when she calls the people in her long-distance paparazzi shots "happy," nor are we meant to feel this good life to be vitally good—it is rather good from the outside, "good" in a very particular way. Of course, Samuels is deeply interested in what Bishop calls "shallow," and her core argument is that "shallow" is rarely as "shallow" does. But the fact of the matter is that "Pleasure Seas" is a troubled poem, intoning the word "happy" to itself, by the end, over and over again in a way that cannot but make us think that the poem doth protest too much.

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Pork Kidneys, Cotton Wool, and Ordinary Evenings

Modernism and the Ordinary
by Liesl Olson
Oxford University Press, 2009. 200 pages

Brooke Horvath

At the close of *The Alphabet of Grace,* self-described "part-time Christian" Frederick Buechner writes that, like everyone, he approaches grace "down through the litter and the letters of the day" (112), for the world is what there is to know. Yet it is not for everyone to "bless what there is for being" (134) in the words of W. H. Auden. The ordinary, the everyday, has often been viewed not as path to or locus of transcendence but as an unfortunate detour or obstacle. Part of the task of the Biblical prophets, for instance, involved dismaying their audiences by awakening them to how far in their day-to-day lives they had strayed from God's desires and so shaking them free of habitual behaviors. Similarly, in the 1961 novel *The Moviegoer,* Walker Percy's Binx Bolling is still lamenting our inability to transcend "the everydayness" of life. Indeed, Binx insists that "what people really fear is not that the bomb will fall but that the bomb will not fall" (228). Whether it means salvation or annihilation, escaping the everyday has been on the western agenda for millennia, and a similar program has informed a good part of the interest in modernist literature: the authors' search for release from or transcendence of the everyday, however comfortably habitable.

As Liesl Olson reminds us, this privileging of transcendence—and hence of psychological interiority and "extremes of self-consciousness"—is deeply involved in our understanding of modernism. It is what James Joyce meant by "epiphany," Virginia Woolf by "moment of being," Ezra Pound by "magic moment," and T. S. Eliot by the "still point of the turning world" (qtd. in Olson 3). Olson does not wish to contest this reading but rather to qualify it by drawing attention to modernism's equal preoccupation with the ordinary. It is not just that the everyday constitutes most of life, nor that those "magic moments" arise necessarily out of the everyday and must be accommodated into the everyday once, like Pippa, epiphany passes and, with God back in His Heaven, one must get right

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with the world. Despite the work of theorists of the everyday (Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau are Olson's principal sources), who contend that the mundane is "typified by inattention," pervasive and yet unlocatable in any "set of practices" (12), hence impossible to represent, Olson demonstrates ably the ways in which modernism can be read as a search for the means of rendering the commonplace and habitual.

In a thoughtful introduction, Olson prepares her readers to understand that the ordinary is no simple subject, its analysis involving far more than noticing and providing a meaning for the abundance of everyday detail packing, say, the pages of *Ulysses* or *Mrs. Dalloway.* First, despite modernism's "commitment to . . . experiences that are *not* heightened" but presented as in and of themselves a "final good" (4), a difficulty arises: to include the ordinary in a work of literature already risks, if it does not unavoidably constitute, a transformation of the ordinary. Thus, because modernism "treats the ordinary with a new centrality, putting pressure on the notion of a coherent individual subject, and reconfiguring (but not rejecting) representations of temporality and material culture as crucial to a representation of character" (18), techniques for handling the everyday raise questions about its relation to realism, to plot ("frequently just the opposite of the ordinary" [21]), and to ethics (from questions of the value of representing the overlooked to questions about the connections between moral decisions and the subjective everydayness informing them). Because the often banal realm of subjective everydayness houses ethical choice and one's sense of a coherent self, modernism understands the mundane not as a catalog of details (Bloom's outhouse visit, his love of urinous pork kidneys, the potato in his pocket) or activities (cooking that kidney, fetching the mail, sharing coffee and a bun with Stephen) but, to quote Rita Felski, "a way of experiencing the world" (19). Further, if the ordinary is experiential, then it is conditioned by an author's or character's class, gender, and politics (just as reading about the ordinary is doubtless colored by our own ideological sympathies and blind spots).

The problem then is how to make the everyday signify *as* the everyday, to capture the significance it carries without making it mean something else or seeing it as the means to something else, all the while taking account of those things—class and the rest—that qualify the collective nature of our shared experience of the commonplace. To explore how this has been variously attempted, Olson devotes the next four chapters to four representative modernists: Joyce (*Ulysses*), Woolf (principally *Mrs. Dal-*

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loway), Gertrude Stein (her World War II work, in particular *Mrs. Reynolds*), and Wallace Stevens (with an extended consideration of "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven"). One strength of Olson's study is that she is too smart to suggest that modernists agreed on how the everyday was to be handled; thus, her readings largely avoid the repetitious although they do overlap and often echo one another. Another strength is that, focused though she may be on particular texts, she has at her command a familiarity not only with the secondary literature devoted to those texts but also with the authors' other work (including letters, essays, lectures) as well as biography and a small library of theory, both literary and otherwise, all of which serves her well (when it does not, as occasionally it does, provide as much clutter as clarity).

Chapter One, "Joyce and the Realism of the Ordinary," asks what Joyce was trying to accomplish through the overload of commonplace experiences that is *Ulysses,* which Olson reads as "an attempt to create narrative out of the nonevent" (46). The answer, as I have already noted, is not a climactic epiphany, for, as Olson shows, Joyce had abandoned such a notion by the time he came to write the story of Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom. Rather, *Ulysses* is "a work that shows how life cannot be organized artfully into epiphanic events," a work that reveals experience as "flooded with moments that are difficult to privilege, harder to 'read into'" (41). The desire to transform the world is, in the novel, equated with Stephen Dedalus, who "desire[s] to free himself from the context of his surroundings, to raise himself above life by making his life into art"—an exercise finally adjudged "politically irresponsible" (47). A novel "more interested in the history of a particular time and place than in individual, revelatory experience," *Ulysses* has as its political aims revealing "the deadening effects of life in Dublin" and puncturing a "deluded romanticism" (39).

Enamored early of what he took to be Henrik Ibsen's "unmeditated mimesis" (39), Joyce soon saw this steady Stendhalian lamp as more will-o'-the-wisp. It is not just "that facts can neither adequately reconstitute the world nor totally 'sum up' experience" (34); it is also the case, Olson argues, that "there is no language that is not, on some level, interpretive and therefore transformative" (45). What then to do, should one wish to record but not transform events of commonplace life? Joyce's partial solution, Olson offers, is the list, which contributes to the "epic reconstruction of June 16, 1904, while challenging the notion that one day can

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be accurately recorded" (35). Moreover, lists resist the reader's inclination to interpret some details as "more or less important" than others while reminding us that "the everyday is important, but—quite simply—not *that* important" (36). However, if the list is stylistically the closest verbal approximation of the everyday, Joyce's lists, often withholding what a reader most desires to know, reveal how arbitrary and disconnected is whatever gets selected from ordinary life as the means to represent it. Another means of capturing the impossibility of "showing forth" (50) the ordinary world, familiar to all readers of Joyce, is "the sheer plurality of styles in *Ulysses,*" which suggests the inadequacy of any one style or combination of styles to represent objectively the ordinary.

One question that inevitably arises from a reading of Joyce is the reader's role in the making of meaning, for the novel raises to the level of self-consciousness "what we notice, and makes sure that even the most conscientious reader will leave something out" (46), at the same time underscoring our own role in finding patterns, in prioritizing what we have noticed—and thereby teaches us, the novel finished, how we make sense of the everyday in our own lives. Joyce, Olson concludes, approaches the ordinary "by keeping it open" (55), suggesting "that life is not easily made into neat fictions" because it is stranger than any account of it, more various and haphazard.

Chapter Two, "Virginia Woolf and the 'Cotton Wool of Daily Life,'" argues that, as with Joyce, "Woolf's modernism is not only concerned with recording the subjective mind or heightened experience, but deeply invested, stylistically and ideologically, in representing the ordinary" (58). For Woolf, one concern is sociopolitical: the degree to which the ordinary is shared across class and gender divides. Another concern is the ways in which "English ordinariness" is dictated by history. Thus, with then-recent history in mind, "the ordinary becomes a means by which the magnitude of the war [World War I] can be managed" (82). Just as Woolf contrasts the prosaic and the poetic, being (heightened moments) and nonbeing (the everyday), and inwardness with a "materialist style" (conventional realism), so she contrasts trauma and the habitual, the latter "the place where shock is absorbed." With *Mrs. Dalloway* her example, Olson compares the inward turn of Septimus with Clarissa's normalizing, anxiety-absorbing immersion in "unselfconscious routines" (67).

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Like Joyce, Woolf finds the "main quality of the ordinary" to be its elusiveness, however innovative one's style—a point pursued in the chapter's final section through a consideration of the fiction written after *Mrs. Dalloway*. The argument unfolds something like this: because the inwardness of the soul "has been overridden by the plurality of a social world" (61), whatever "moments of being" one experiences have been shaped by daily nonbeing and gain value only back in the world of the everyday, that "place where real change can actually manifest itself" (64). Woolf felt further that "materialistic detail" alone can never "represent experience," which requires attention to "the inside as well as the outside" (83), as well as to historically determined minutia and "overlooked routines" (86), to bring what is hidden to light. This being so, Olson concludes that Woolf's fiction, with its commitment to representing the ordinary, is finally not starkly different from the realism she sometimes criticized.

For Woolf, Olson writes, the ordinary became a defense against trauma, war, and death. So, too, for Gertrude Stein, whose World War II writings—*Paris France, Wars I Have Seen,* and *Mrs. Reynolds*—are examined in Chapter Three, "Gertrude Stein, William James, and Habit in the Shadow of War." In part because Stein studied with James at Radcliffe, the chapter commences with a discussion of William James's ideas about habits, a discussion that quickly involves Olson in a comparison of James's ideas with those of Walter Pater and Henri Bergson. What results is needlessly intricate, however, insofar as Stein's preoccupation with the habitual does not share much with that of James, who (unlike Stein) emphasized habit as a vehicle for self-improvement and the mark of a "fully formed character" (90).

Where Stein and James agree is in their belief that habit "allows individuals to filter external stimuli, to choose how to respond to these stimuli, [and] to limit the chaos of experience" (92). For Stein, this means, as far as her war writing is concerned, finding in the habitual a refuge from all that war brings, even to noncombatants, and thereby a means of inhabiting a pre-war everyday life; indeed, it means finding a way of suspending time and of living "outside the historical moment" (153). Olson reads certain features of Stein's experimental narratives—for instance, her fondness for the present tense and her reliance on repetition—as stylistic devices bent on resisting time and change. Stein does not intend such devices, in other words, to defamiliarize habitual experience or make it yield epiphanic significance but rather to keep the familiar present—a

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desideratum that "marks the limits of her modernism" (99) and proves for Olson an inadequate response to two world wars (it is difficult on this point to disagree). Such a use of the ordinary is, Olson charges, "self-deceiving" and parochial, calling into question "the positive function of habit" (104).

Although Olson wishes not "to denounce Stein's real life choices" (91), denunciation of both Stein's avant-gardism (Stein's "aesthetic seems both ahead of and behind her time" [114]) and her morals ("her reaction to the twentieth-century's worst crimes illuminates an extremely problematic escapism, cloaked as pacifism and anchored in habit" [113]) ripples just beneath the surface. Something similar occurs in Chapter Four ("Wallace Stevens's Commonplace"), although here Olson seems to wish to exculpate Stevens, who, she insists, wanted to write poetry that "reflect[ed] the complicated influence of wartime news upon the lives of people at home" but struggled with "how his poems could or should" do so (119). The solution—which requires reading Stevens as engaging the social world "by looking at other people's ordinary experience" (120)—is unsatisfying, at least as regards the achievement of political ends. This is so not because one wishes Stevens to have done something else, to have been more straightforwardly political—as the poet Sherod Santos observed several years ago, poets "write those poems they *can* write, not always those they want to write" (291)—but because Olson's effort to exonerate Stevens from Steinian escapism and indifference fails to persuade.

Olson's analysis of Stevens is stronger when she steps away from politics and war to consider more generally what motivated Stevens's interest in the commonplace, an interest carefully established via remarks by the poet in letters and lectures. In his efforts to make poetry from the commonplace news of the day, Stevens was drawn, writes Olson, not to facts or "a dense materialism" (116) but to "the state of mind and the style of the commonplace" (115), finding in untransformed ordinariness "a final good" (116). The commonplace, then, implicated always in one's historical moment, is for Stevens finally an attitude toward "the simple yet striking moments of ordinary life" (124)—moments likely to be "unacknowledged, undervalued, or unrepresented," moments that inspire poems that tend to think about ordinary experience rather than to replicate it mimetically. Such moments are a sane "middle ground" (125) in an age "of ideological endpoints, of conditions that seem overwhelming" with the imagination's proper poetic business not the construction of "danger-

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ous myths" or the transcendence of reality but the contesting of the brute facts of modern life with the aim of helping us persevere.

Such a notion of poetry is, of course, self-serving. Valuing the commonplace enabled Stevens to accept the life he had chosen: the comfortable, routinized life of an insurance-company lawyer, whether in the midst of the Great Depression, World War II, or the Cold War. Even when his attention turned to things foreign, to "other people's commonplaces" (134), or to war's atrocities, atomic and otherwise, Olson observes, Stevens sought a resemblance to his own familiar experiences—an attitude Olson labels "startlingly blasé" but necessary to a poet who "envision[ed] himself part of a world of people who simply carry on" (135). These ideas coalesce in an extended reading of "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," a poem notable for the way it privileges "the good of repetition as a way of living and moving forward, the eschewal of abstraction in favor of the physical earth, the pervasive and elusive quality of the everyday, and the desire to see things for what they are, untransformed by metaphor" (137). Although "Ordinary Evening" does not receive anything resembling a close reading, Olson usefully surveys its meditative "meandering" to highlight the poem's "mood and style" (138), its refusal of romantic sentimentality, its "disavowal of epiphanic or sublime moments" (139), its inclination to circle concerns rather than drive toward conclusions. For Olson, "Ordinary Evening" means to confirm a commitment to the routine and to espouse "ordinary experience as the only substantial truth" (144), its language understood not as "transformative description" but "part of the thing it describes, part of experience itself" (147).

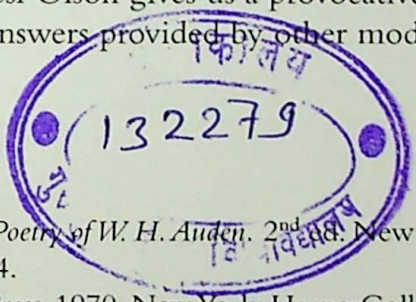
"Conclusion: Beginnings and Endings: Proust's Temporality and the Everyday" is less a conclusion to Olson's argument than an extension of it. Here, the focus is on the temporality of the everyday and "the fundamental incompatibility of the everyday with narrative form" (150). Because everyday experiences cannot be systematized, read as necessarily yielding significant meaning, or organized into beginnings, middles, and ends, "to embrace the everyday is to embrace our inability to envision life as narrative." The example now is *In Search of Lost Time,* in which time is a subjective flux, speeding up and slowing down, with habit serving a stabilizing function and (as with Stein) creating "an aura of changelessness" (154) while giving life "local" beginnings, middles, ends—all of which add up to a means of attaining "health and sanity" (152), albeit at the cost of deadening Proust's narrator, Marcel, to the sorts of "spiritual pleasure" he

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also values. The use of repetition and manipulation of verb tense help to evoke this habitual present, which, when broken, finally permits Marcel to find a narrative form for his life "that both befits and defies the everyday" (153). This last point provokes a comparison of Proust and Beckett, Olson observing that the two share a sense of art as "an affront to the very openness of living" (156) in its effort to undo both time and habit—an effort ultimately defeated by life's relentless temporality.

The strengths of *Modernism and the Ordinary* are its readable prose and its sensitive, wide-ranging engagement with its subjects. Olson has seemingly read everything, and only occasionally does this become burdensome, the argument slowing because of the weight of all that its author knows. Given her concerns, Olson offers surprisingly little close reading and seems at best modestly interested in stylistics. The Joyce and Woolf chapters are the strongest, perhaps because Olson's ideas of the ordinary have yet to become for the reader, well, ordinary: although particular concerns vis-à-vis the everyday and the stylistic innovations necessary to represent it vary from author to author, there is enough common ground that the topic becomes a bit same ol' same ol' by the later chapters. *Modernism and the Ordinary* remains, however, a striking, useful investigation into a central but neglected feature of modernism. Does the ordinary motivate one to bomb or bless? Liesl Olson gives us a provocative set of ideas with which to examine the answers provided by other modernists and their heirs.



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